Regionalism and Religion
The Tamil Renaissance and Popular Hinduism

Charles Ryerson

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REGIONALISM AND RELIGION: THE TAMIL RENAISSANCE AND POPULAR HINDUISM

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PREFACE

The study examines a particular Indian region, Tamil Nadu, during a specific period of time, 1949 to 1972. To understand that area and period, it delves into the distant past but it emphasises the years 1949 to 1972 because those were " the golden years " of the Tamil renaissance. During those years most Tamils underwent a cultural revolution in which they forged and articulated a regional identity—although that identity retained firm links with the past. The flames of their identity quest were fanned by, and reflected in, a political and cultural party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Progressive Dravidian Federation). Much has been written of this movement and party in political terms but very little has been recorded of its religious dimensions and consequences. What little has been said has, in my opinion, often been mistaken.

On October 18, 1972, the DMK split into two factions. M. G. Ramachandran (M.G.R.), a popular film star, formed the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). The " Anna " stands for C. N. Annadurai, founder—in 1949—of the DMK. " Anna " also means " elder brother " and was a title Annadurai's adoring followers conferred on him. He died, tragically, of cancer in early 1969, less than two years after his surprise 1967 election victory. The " All-India " part of the AIADMK title is, presumably, to emphasise that the party views itself as a regional party but one related to the rest of India. The DMK had been founded on a secessionist manifesto but gave up that goal under pressure from the central government and for practical political reasons.

The split in the movement came not from policy disputes, however, but because of personality differences. M. Karunanidhi, also from the world of the cinema, had succeeded Annadurai as Chief Minister and a long rivalry between M.G.R. and Karunanidhi could no longer be contained. On issues, both parties basically agree although M.G.R.'s avuncular style contrasts with Karunanidhi's more aggressive stance. Before the schism, Karunanidhi—with the aid of M.G.R.—had led his party to a sweeping victory

in the 1971 elections. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, seeking to legitimise her " New " Congress party, was a partner with the DMK in that election.

On January 31, 1976, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who had declared an " Emergency " in India the year before, dismissed the DMK government and the Centre took over the State. In March 1977, she called surprise elections for all of India. In Tamil Nadu these were only for Parliament. Mrs. Gandhi's Congress (I) party joined with the AIADMK against an alliance led by Karunanidhi and the remnants of the Old Congress which had been formed by the venerable Tamil leader, K. Kamaraj. Mrs. Gandhi lost that election on the All-India level but the AIADMK-Congress (I) alliance polled 58.69 per cent of the vote in Tamil Nadu to only 37.28 per cent for the DMK front.

The Assembly elections in the State were held three months later. Abandoning the idea of alliances (which work better in Tamil Nadu than in most other states) each major party ran on its own. The AIADMK won 30.6 per cent of the votes, the DMK 24.4 per cent, Congress (I) 17 per cent, and the Old Congress, running as the Janata party, obtained only 16.4 per cent. Effects of the " Emergency " were felt. The percentage of voters who voted, which—stimulated by the renaissance—had been the highest in India, dropped to 61.1 per cent. In ten years the participation of eligible Tamil voters had fallen by 15 per cent—evidence of a growing disillusionment with politics but still a high turnout.

In 1980 a renewed Congress (I) DMK alliance defeated the AIADMK in Parliamentary elections but, only six months later, the AIADMK decisively defeated that alliance in Assembly elections. Regionalism was still flourishing in Tamil Nadu.

Four years later, in 1984, the AIADMK-Congress (I) coalition was renewed and it won easily, gaining all but two of the Parliamentary seats and 198 of the 232 Assembly seats. The remainder went to the DMK front. Again, however, knowledgeable observers agreed that the Dravidian parties are the dominant leaders of their respective alliances and the pro-Congress (I) newspaper, *The Hindu*, admitted that, despite the turbulent events preceding the election and " notwithstanding the landslide of the. . . . . .

Congress (I) AIADMK combine. . .the electorate in Madras have voted almost in the pattern of 1980." [1]

Although my study does not concentrate on these more recent events, they will be referred to and reasons for them will be advanced. This volume is written in the conviction that the years 1949 to 1972 are the fruition of earlier developments in Tamil Nadu and cast essential light on what has happened since. Some—perhaps much—of the earlier idealism has gone from the Dravidian movement but that movement remains the most important political and cultural force in Tamil Nadu.

While this study attempts to chronicle the development of an articulate Tamil regionalism it also, in my opinion, furthers an understanding of political-cultural processes throughout India. Mr. N. T. Rama Rao and his Telugu Desam party in Andhra Pradesh are repeating, to some extent, the processes that have been operating in Tamil Nadu. Mr. Rama Rao is also from the cinema world and he expresses and represents, in a popular manner, a regional identity. This identity is drawn from Andhra's own pool of regional symbols, more "Sanskritised" than those of the Tamils but Rama Rao's technique and style—if not his world view—bear a more than coincidental resemblance to those of C. N. Annadurai twenty years ago. Just as the undivided DMK once formed the leading non-Congress party in Parliament so today does the Telugu Desam party. Throughout contemporary India, there is a close affinity between "regional Hinduism" and regional politics. Each stimulates the other. This need not be a cause for alarm, however, since the All-India "Great Tradition" penetrates all of these regional traditions.

As I write these lines, M. G. Ramachandran is in failing health. His future will obviously have an enormous impact on future events in a Dravidian movement split more by personality than policy differences. India's most recent elections, which were a triumph for her democratic institutions after an autumn of multiple tragedies, also may have considerable influence on Tamil Nadu's political alignments. After the blows wrought by

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[1] *The Hindu* (International Edition), January 5, 1985.

communalism, assassination, and technological death at Bhopal Mr. Rajiv Gandhi has an opportunity to foster throughout India the inspiring Nehru ideals of secularism and social justice.

India, however, remains a nation of vast economic disparities and enriching cultural differences. The study affirms that India does have an underlying cultural unity and it further asserts that this unity has grown during the years since Independence. It is written in the sure conviction, however, that if regional and religious differences are ignored—or unrecognised—by those who govern India then new strains in India's body politic are inevitable.

India can best thrive if her cultural differences are accepted and even applauded. That is why so many of us, Indian and foreign who love India feel that her democracy is a necessity rather than a luxury. Democracy appreciates cultural differences, allows them to flourish, and provides a framework for dialogue, compromise, and growing unity. This study is meant to aid all those who care for India to more fully recognise one region's—Tamil Nadu's—uniqueness and also its All-India qualities. It is also written in the hope that it will concentrate more attention on India's various " regional Hinduisms " and their relationships to India's political life and to her incredibly rich " Great Tradition . "

CHARLES A. RYERSON

January 12, 1985.

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While this study has been considerably revised, it is based on doctoral dissertation research that I did from 1970 to 1972. However, since I had spent seven years in India before that on various educational programmes, the number of persons to whom I owe a special debt of gratitude is alarmingly large. Many deserving individuals in India, America, and Europe will remain unmentioned, but I have not forgotten them. The dedication at the beginning of this study covers several of these special people. The American College in Madurai provided my introduction to Tamil Nadu and India and it has remained central to my Indian pilgrimage.

Tamil friends who were especially helpful in the preparation of this volume are K. Manoharan, J. Thyagarajan, K. S. Ramakrishnan, S. T. Baskaran, E. Annamalai, S. Chidambaram, P. Jeyachandran, M. Natarajan, M. Needhivanan, G. Vijavenugopal and the *Crea* group in Madras.

Annamalai University, during periods from 1962-64, and the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, between 1970 and 1972, provided places of refuge and enlightenment. The first two Vice-Chancellors of Madurai University (now Madurai-Kamaraj University), Dr. T. P. Meenakshisundaranar and Dr. M. Varadarajanar, helped make it possible for me to return to Tamil Nadu and remained interested in my research. One of my most influential relationships has been with the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society. Much of my India pilgrimage has been shaped by the impact upon me of its first two directors, Paul Devanandan and M. M. Thomas.

John Carman of Harvard University's Centre for the Study of World Religions and Ainslie Embree of Columbia University gave me valuable aid and encouragement. James A. Martin, Jr., of Columbia University's Department of Religion displayed enormous patience and support as did his successor as Chairman of the Department, Gillian Lindt. Conrad Arensberg came to my rescue when I was in dire need. Paul Valliere and Koichi

Shinohara were Columbia friends to whom I owe much for our discussions of religion and the world. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin deserves a special word of gratitude.

At various times, in addition to Columbia University, four different groups have provided financial support for my stays in India : the Oberlin-Shansi Memorial Association, the Overseas Mission Society, the Overseas Department of the Episcopal Church, and the United Church Board for World Ministries. Telfer Mook, of the latter, was a continual source of strength.

I cannot compile a list of akcnowledgements without referring to Tamil Nadu's so-called " lower classes. " They gave me the amused acceptance and tolerance which can be acknowledged but never repaid. I only hope this study bears some witness to my grateful relationship with them and to the education they were always giving me.

At times my language echoes that of Llyod and Suzanne Rudolph. I first met the Rudolphs in 1956 when we were all new to India and they visited the city of Madurai. Their pioneering theorising has had a great influence on my thinking about " the modernity of tradition. "

Finally, I must thank Richard W. Taylor, my patient but persistent editor at the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society ; Judy Lang, of Princeton Theological Seminary, who typed the final draft, and President Thomas Gillespie of the Seminary for granting me leave to revise my dissertation into this volume.

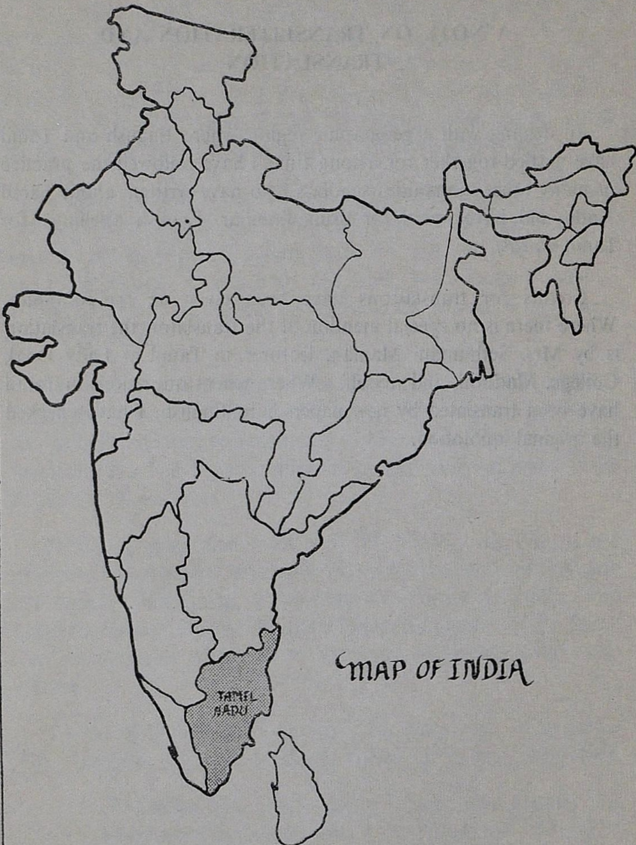
To the Administration, Faculty, Students and Workers of The American College, Madurai, India : 1955-1958, 1961-1964.

> " To the learned, every country is one's own country, and every town one's own town." *Tirukkural*, 40 : 397

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

In dealing with a geographic region where English and Tamil have nestled together for a long time, I have followed the practice of many other humanities scholars who have written about Tamil Nadu and have opted for using familiar English spellings for Tamil words.

Credits for translations have been given in the footnotes. Where there is no special mention of the translator, the translation is by Mrs. Sethumani Manian, lecturer in Tamil at Lady Doak College, Madurai, and myself. Where recent quotations in Tamil have been translated by newspapers into English, I have checked the original quotation.



MAP OF INDIA

PROLOGUE

As in much of the so-called "developing" world, to be in India today is to gain a heightened awareness of history. The centuries, rather than marching after one another in more or less disciplined ranks, run—or perhaps crawl—alongside one another. Vivid and often paradoxical contrasts surround one and from them one gains not only a greater insight into the past, but also a feeling of existing on the cutting edge of current events, the horizon of history. Let me briefly outline three rather prosaic experiences in South India, which, like rocks poking above a rushing torrent may serve as stepping stones helping one to understand the meaning of contemporary history.

The first incident took place a few years ago just outside the old temple town of Kumbakonam. It was night; I was wandering through one of the famous temples built during the twelfth century A.D. in the period of the magnificent Chola Dynasty. The dimly lit stone corridors were virtually deserted. Then, I heard singing. I followed the sound through the winding, elaborately carved corridors until I came to a small hall. There, on a straw mat on the stone floor, naked to the waist, lit only by the flickering lights of an oil lamp, sat a man singing. The music that issued from his lips was so poignant, so beautiful, that it brought tears to my eyes. I'm not certain of the exact words that he sang but I do know that they came from Manickavasagar's *Tiruvasagam*, one of the intensely moving compilations of verse that emerged from the Tamil-speaking country's *bhakti* movement—or movement of devotion —a movement that had repercussions on the religious life of all of India.

The words of my solitary singer might well have been the following:

> Thrills and trembles my frame
> Hands are lifted on high
> Here at thy fragrant feet
> Sobbing and weeping I cry.

Falsehood forsaking, I shout,
"Victory, victory, praise !"
Lord of my life, these clasped hands
Worship shall bring Thee, always.

Indra or Vishnu or Brahm,
Their divine bliss crave not I
I seek the love of thy saints,
Though my house perish thereby.
To the worst hell I will go
So but thy grace be with me.
Best of all, how could my heart
Think of a God beside Thee ?[1]

Here is the Indian spiritual tradition in one of its finest flowerings. The poet, Manickavasagar, looks beyond the names of God to the God beyond God and knows that he lives, and moves, and has his being because of this Deity, present here and now, able to be experienced through an ecstasy of devotion. Manickavasagar took an Indian tradition of devotion, refashioned it, and infused it with an outpouring of love that would later lead to a unique Southern Saivism—*Saiva Siddhanta.* In this incident at the temple, then, one sees India's spiritual tradition in one of its most creative manifestations.

The second episode came about six months later. With a friend, I was standing at Kanyakumari, the southern tip of India, absorbing an incredibly beautiful sunset. Suddenly, against the blood-red sky, I saw a small dark object followed by a trail of white. Eagerly, my friend pointed, remarking that this was one of the rockets being sent up from Thumba on the west coast by the government in a current series of atmospheric tests. I couldn't help but think at that moment how the rocket and its vapour trail against the sunset symbolised the inevitable onrush of modern science and technology that is transforming India's civilization as surely as the Europe of the thirteenth century was changed.

A few months after seeing the rocket at Kanyakumari, I did what was usual when I settled down for a while in my homebase, the city of Madurai : I went to a Tamil movie. Prime Minister Nehru used to call the sprouting dams and hydroelectric projects

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[1] *Hymns of the Tamil Saivite Saints*, trans. and ed., F. Kingsbury and G. E. Phillips, Calcutta : Association Press, 1921, p. 89.

the new temples of India but an Indian friend of mine, chuckling a bit, told me the cinema theatres were really India's new temples. With little organised recreation, movies are extraordinarily popular entertainment. Most movies are not too good. People have enough realism in their everyday lives and thrive on three hour romantic comedies filled with music and dance. The movie I went to see, however, called *Nanuum Oru Penn* ("I Too Am a Woman") was a particularly good one. It dealt with a social theme, the problem of a young woman who no one wanted to marry because her skin was too dark. Like many movies much inferior to it, its songs were written by one of South India's finest, contemporary poets, a talented lyricist named Kannadasan.

In one song, the young woman addresses an image of the popular god Krishna, which is sitting on a shelf in her home. Krishna, known as Kanna in the Tamil-speaking country because of the Tamil dislike of the North Indian Sanskritic "sh" sound is always portrayed as a god of dark hue.

> Kanna, O dark Kanna,
> There is no man who hasn't seen you ;
> There is no man who disapproves of or hates you.
> There is no man, alas, who accepts me.
> On, Kanna, you have sent me to men
> Who refuse to perceive my spotless heart,
> Who see only my dark skin to revile.
> You failed to put me in a proper place. . .
> You gave me a golden heart, in it left a tender
>   feeling like a flower,
> But you have hidden it from human eyes.
> To fulfil what duty on earth
> Did you create me, Oh Kanna ?[2]

Here, through the cinema, a modern medium of mass communication, the poet blends old and new into a creative synthesis. Through reference to traditional religious symbols and through a traditional literary form, he attacks an age old social problem, but he does it in a strikingly novel way. This incident illustrates how a complex amalgam of "traditional" and "modern" is growingly a part of the present age and how, under the impact

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[2] Kannadasan, *Nanuum Oru Penn,* trans. E. Annamalai.

of technology, new mass cultures are emerging, cultures which are a synthesis of old and new.

These three incidents, then, reflect the contemporary dynamic of history, that which goes into the composition of history in our day. There is the presence of venerable cultures around the globe, the slow but steady transformation of these cultures under the impact of science and technology, and the emergence of cultures in which the old becomes something new, although retaining and expanding many elements of its past. Sometimes this synthesis is creative, sometimes destructive, but it always is ambivalent and paradoxical and incomplete. And it must be remembered that " traditions " have always been changing.

More must be said, however. To speak of " synthesis " and " amalgam " makes the process too bland, too smooth, too automatic. It glides over the eye of today's historic hurricane. For at the core of these new mass movements are persons seeking their identities in the midst of social change. I think the essential direction of contemporary India, and of much of the rest of the world, came clear to me one day, several years ago, when I was wandering through some South Indian villages that had been caught up in the worst caste riots that India had seen since Independence. Outcastes had risen in unprecedented violence against their upper caste masters. I especially remember talking to a nineteen-year old outcaste boy. His hut had been burned, his meager rice stocks destroyed, and he was frightened. But he looked me straight in the eyes and said, " I will never take off my shirt before an upper caste man again, even if he kills me. " (In that region, it had been traditional for the outcastes to always appear before the higher castes barechested as a mark of respect.) In the ferment which is today's India, this young man had become aware of himself as a person with a dignity and an equality that should be respected.

Synthesis, yes, but also a paradoxical and agonised search for identity. It exists, in different forms and on different levels of consciousness, amongst both rural peasants and urban intelligentsia. This quest for meaning by individuals and cultures, East and West, " developed " and " developing ", is the main current of the contemporary torrent, the central thrust of the history of our time.

CHAPTER 1

OF THEORY AND METHOD

When Dr. Thomas O'Dea, my former professor and indispensable *guru*, put into my hands a copy of *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia*, I found myself simultaneously exposed to sociologist Robert Bellah and anthropologist Clifford Geertz. They will be much mentioned and my central questions are the same as those which stimulated the seminar which formed the foundation for that seminal book.

Clifford Geertz articulated these questions. The first is, for me, the most important :

> The first thing we know obviously very little about. . . . would be the changes in religions now going on. We know very little about really what is happening to Hinduism, Buddhism, to Islam. . . The mere use of such terms as "Islam," "Buddhism". . . .and so on, tends to make us think of a religion as a kind of block, an eternal object that is always the same—somehow outside of the historical process. But of course religion is not just a barrier to the changes which are going on in the modern world but is very much caught up in them. . . .[1]

My study is above all an attempt to partially lift that veil of ignorance in one corner of the world.

Geertz offers several suggestions for a conceptual framework to approach the question of religion and change. He distinguishes between what he and other social scientists have called the "cultural" level and the "social structural" level, "that is the level of notions, of ideas, of values, of orientations. . . on the one hand, and actual social organisations, social structures, class systems. . .on the other."[2] Geertz admits that these two cannot actually be separated but he feels it is useful conceptually to keep

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[1] Clifford Geertz, "The Discussion," *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia*, ed. by R. Bellah, New York : The Free Press, 1965, p. 155.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

them apart. He first discussed this distinction in his essay, "Ritual and Social Change."

> Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes. . . . The one considers social action in respect to its meaning for those who carry it out, the other considers it in terms of its contribution to the functioning of some social system.[3]

I shall attempt a primarily cultural analysis, concentrating on meanings as seen and articulated by the social actors I examine, although social structural elements will not be completely ignored.

Geertz continued his discussion of conceptual frameworks by warning against

> falling into the logic of false dichotomies which has been the characteristic trait of so much of sociology and anthropology from the days of the *Gemeinschaft—Gesellschaft* distinction forward. . . Here I am raising the question of whether the simple dichotomy of traditional versus modern is really a very useful way of thinking about things.[4]

As has already been hinted in my "Prologue," this volume will try to demonstrate that tradition and modernity, community and society, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, are useful models only if they are viewed concurrently rather than sequentially. Often, tradition and modernity, folk and urban, have been viewed not just as ideal types but as representations of an evolutionary or "progressive" movement in history. Also, their dichotomous nature has been stressed rather than their interpenetration.

In one of his earliest essays, Geertz provided another useful conceptual tool. Drawing upon much previous anthropological discussion he distinguished between "world view" and "ethos." World view is an individual's or a people's "picture of the way things in sheer actuality are. . . . . . These are the 'cognitive,' 'existential' aspects of a given culture."[5] Ethos, on the

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[3] Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, p. 145.

[4] Clifford Geertz, "The Discussion," *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[5] Clifford Geertz, "Ethos, World View and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols," *The Interpretation of Cultures, op. cit.*, p. 127.

other hand, provides "the evaluative elements......the tone, character and quality of a people's life, their moral and esthetic style and mood."[6] In one of his more recent works, Geertz asserts that "sacred symbols...formulate an image of the world's construction and a programme for human conduct that are mere reflexes of one another"[7]—in short, they link world view and ethos in ways which reinforce each. Geertz's discussion of world view and ethos reflects his definition of culture in general, but I am concentrating on religion and change, and in so doing I shall write of "religious culture," meaning a people's world view and ethos and the "sacred symbols" which represent and link these two.

When engaging in the analysis of a culture, I find I must turn to another anthropologist for a final set of conceptual tools. For Robert Redfield, every civilization has the "high" cultural traditions of the reflective few (the "Great Tradition") and the "low" folk traditions of the unreflective many (the "Little Traditions"). Redfield, and his disciple and colleague, Milton Singer, provided in 1954 one of their more comprehensive definitions of a Great Tradition :

> Embodied in "sacred books"..., sanctified by a cult expressed in monuments, sculpture, painting, and architecture, served by the arts and sciences, the Great Tradition becomes a core culture of an indigenous civilization and a source, consciously examined, for defining its moral, legal, esthetic, and other cultural norms. A Great Tradition describes a way of life and as such is a vehicle and standard for those who share it to identify with one another as members of a common civilization.[8]

The Great Tradition is developed and communicated by intellectual specialists (literati) but, as Singer has written elsewhere, between these

> learned specialists....and the unlearned masses....there.... exist...many kinds of intermediary specialists....which

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[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed*, New Haven : Yale University Press, 1968, p. 97.

[8] Robert Redfield and Milton Singer, "The Cultural Role of Cities," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* October, 1954, p. 63.

> act as channels of transmission between "higher" and "lower" levels of tradition.[9]

This transmission is a two-way street, with "Little" affecting "Great", as well as *vice versa.* In this volume, analysing the interactions between these two traditions, and viewing the intermediaries between them, will receive much emphasis.

The "learned specialists" or the "reflective few" who codify a Great Tradition out of Little Traditional materials are engaging in what the pioneering sociologist Max Weber called rationalisation. This term can be used in various ways and I want to make my own usage clear. Weber contrasted societies where the "magicial" or "enchanted" does not transcend everyday life, with a "rationalised" society where transcendant concepts stand above or apart from common place existence, giving members of that society a leverage over their everyday world. Clifford Geertz, following Weber and relating the concept of rationalisation to religious change, has provided a good definition which more explicitly ties in with the Great and Little Tradition dichotomy and interaction. Rationalisation occurred when

> the sense of sacredness was gathered up like so many scattered rays of light brought to focus in a lens from the countless tree spirits and garden spells through which it was vaguely diffused, and was concentrated in a nucleated. . concept of the divine. . .[10]

Redfield and Singer call a Great Tradition which is rationalized out of a Little Tradition an "orthogenetic" civilization. They also recognise that a culture's literati can be faced with an alien tradition which must be reconciled with, or integrated into, their own orthogenetic Great Tradition. The resulting rationalisation, in that case, results in a "heterogenetic" Great Tradition. When this occurs, the learned specialists have mediated not only between their own Great and Little Traditions, but between two Great Traditions. Redfield and Singer call those specialists "cultural brokers."[11]

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[9] Milton Singer, *When A Great Tradition Modernizes* (New York : Praeger, 1972), pp. 255-256.

[10] Clifford Geertz, "Internal Conversion in Contemporary Bali," *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, eds. V. Bastin and R. Roolvink (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 285.

[11] See R. Redfield, and M. Singer, "The Cultural Role of Cities," *op. cit.*

I have posed the underlying question dealt with in this book: the interactions between religion and change in the contemporary world. I have also said that my analysis will be primarily cultural and that I will be guided by my understanding that religious culture is composed of a people's world view and ethos embodied in the symbols which link the two and justify each to the other. I have implied that I see "tradition" and "modernity" as being interrelated and not separate and I have stated that while, for heuristic reasons, I accept a Great Tradition-Little Tradition dichotomy, my main concern is with the interconnections between them and their interactions with other Great Traditions.

In order to deepen the discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of this book, it is necessary to discuss some additional terms. "Modernisation" is in many ways the most difficult of all these terms. Structurally, modernisation has often been described as increasing complexity, differentiation, and adaptability of organizational units. Recruitment to occupations on the basis of achievement rather than by ascriptive criteria and the spread of potential power to wider groups in the society have also often been stressed as indices of modernisation.

I am primarily concerned, however, with what modernisation means culturally and especially for cultural consciousness. One of the most exciting thinkers on this issue is that other disciple of Weber and Émile Durkheim, Robert Bellah. In one brief essay, especially, much of his thought is summarised. That essay, *Meaning and Modernization*, has been very important to me. Bellah defines modernisation as "a new mentality," a new attitude toward change. He quotes with approval Alfred North Whitehead's statement that this "new mentality is even more important than the new science and the new technology."[12] Change, in this new mentality, is viewed as something "to be welcomed, to be responsibly and intelligently guided" which requires a "great social-psychological revolution" because it "seems to violate one of the cardinal requirements for organized action. . .namely the need for continuity. . .for identity." When "successful" this "social-psychological revolution" has produced social and

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[12] Robert Bellah, "Meaning and Modernization," *Beyond Belief*, New York: Harper and Row, 1970, p. 66.

personality systems "capable of combining continuity and change, identity and openness."[13] He argues that either stagnation or breakdown in the face of change is entirely possible, however.

Despite this qualification, Bellah's discussion seems at times to be too optimistic about modernisation and to remove modernity too far from tradition. However, other articles make it clear that he takes the emphasis on "continuity" and "identity" as seriously as that on "change" and "openness." For example, he has written that

> traditional societies. . .are complex entities full of inner tensions that the. . . .impact of modernization simply exacerbates. . . . . .Modernization provides the concepts to express doubts and demands that were already just below the surface of consciousness. . . . . It unleashes powerful forces of destruction. . . .as well as of innovation. But it does not create these forces. Rather they emerge from the patterns of motivation and relationship already existing in the traditional society.[14]

The lines between modern and traditional societies are further blurred by the fact that many traditional civilizations "traditionalise change"—to use a Milton Singer term. Singer has pointed out that in India, for example, change has always been present but it has been accepted and justified by claiming it is really part of the tradition.

> In the process, traditionalisation. . .is. . .a creative incorporation of contemporary events and innovations into the living and changing structure of tradition.[15]

This interaction of "tradition" with "modernity" will be emphasized in my analysis. What modernisation brings that is new, however, is a welcoming of change as being beneficial.

The interpenetration of *Gesellschaft* by *Gemeinschaft*, and the transformation of both by each, is demonstrated by another term, "Primordial Sentiments." The best way to discuss this

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[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Robert Bellah, "Islamic Tradition and Problems of Modernization," *Beyond Belief*, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-59.

[15] Milton Singer, "Beyond Tradition and Modernity in Madras," *When A Great Tradition Modernizes*, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

term is to look at Bellah's "Epilogue" in his *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia* and then return to the article, "Meaning and Modernization." In that epilogue[16] Bellah has attempted to categorize the various reactions of societies when confronted by the changes modernization brings. He sees the views of people around the world as being influenced by the "modern" ideologies of romantic nationalism, liberalism, and socialism.

Each society, however, has its own tradition which responds in its own ways to these three ideologies. Men convert to another religion, stick to a die-hard traditionalism, attempt reform, or foster a neo-traditionalism. In every case, however, the cultural response attempts to gain

> some balance between the need to defend and the need to adapt, between memory and receptivity. Where defensiveness becomes absolute the capacity to deal with the treacherous conditions of the modern world fails. Where adaptation leads to the total rejection of the traditional cultures, the intellectual finds himself isolated and irrelevant.[17]

Thus, Bellah reemphasizes that an element of continuity is necessary in the midst of change ; identity is needed along with openness.

In *Meaning and Modernization*, Bellah synthesizes the many responses he mentioned in *Religion and Progress* into "romantic nationalism" and "radical socialism." Romantic nationalism stresses "solidarity on the basis of primordial identities of language, ethnic origin, and religion."[18] It reemphasizes "the real or supposed unity of the hallowed past. . . .expressed in pseudo-sacred symbolism and ritual." Radical socialism plays on "the deep tensions existing in a traditional society." In these societies "there are disfavoured strata. . . .with a traditional hostility toward the established authorities." While exploiting this "sacrilegious atheistic hostility," inevitably "anti-religion functions as a religion itself, a religion of milennial hope." When radical socialism and romantic nationalism combine, this

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[16] Robert N. Bellah, "Epilogue," *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia, op. cit.*, pp. 199-222.
[17] Bellah, "Epilogue," p. 202.
[18] Robert Bellah, "Meaning and Modernization," *op. cit.*, pp. 71-2.

combination " of national solidarity on the basis of sentimental primordial imagery with a determination to overcome inherited justices and to build a new society makes a powerful motivational basis for directed social change. "[19]

In his definition of romantic nationalism, Bellah used the term " primordial identities " (or " primordial loyalties " in *Religion and Progress*). Clifford Geertz has emerged with the phrase which I prefer, " primordial sentiments. " Geertz borrowed it from the sociologist Edward Shils[20] but it has a long history whose roots can be found in Pareto's " residues " or Tylor's " survivals. " But for Geertz (and Bellah), unlike Tylor or Pareto, these are not remnants from a past time which are slowly disappearing but rather are a part of the modernization process. In the discussion at the conference which gave rise to *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia*, Geertz articulated this view and tied it to the important concept of identity.

> There are at least two sources of identity in the new states. One is a sense of identity that comes essentially from the past, from what the people in the society seem to take as the " givens " of their social existence. . . .[21]

In a slightly later article he calls these " assumed givens—congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on,"[22] echoing Bellah's " language, " " ethnic origin, " and " religion." Geertz's other source of identity

> looks more to the future. . .coming from " the will to be modern," to be respected as a member of a modern state that is like other modern states.[23]

And Geertz, aware of the distinction between cultural and social structural levels, sees that there is always a problem of aligning these two sources of identity " because the boundaries of the polity

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[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Edward Shils, " Primordial, Personal, Sacred, and Civil Ties," *British Journal of Sociology*, June, 1957, pp. 130-45.

[21] Clifford Geertz, " The Discussion," *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia, op. cit.*, pp. 151-2.

[22] Clifford Geertz, " The Integrative Revolution, Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," *The Interpretation of Cultures, op. cit.*, p. 259.

[23] Clifford Geertz, " The Discussion," *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia, op. cit.*, p. 152.

very rarely, particularly in the new states, coincide with the boundaries of the given cultural traditions that define a people."[24]

This original statement can be misleading, however, because it tends to consign "the primordial" to the past—or to place it in opposition to modernity. Later in the discussion, Geertz explicitly denies this. In defining these two types of identity (which following Shils, he calls, "primordial" and "civil") he says,

> I have been trying to emphasize not that they are opposed but that they are concurrent, that they will persist . . . that they interact with each other in a systematic relationship . . . It is not a simple matter of tradition versus modernization . . . of the more of one, the less of the other.[25]

Not only do these sentiments persist, they are "quickened rather than quieted" by the process of modernization.[26] This is because of that other source of identity, the sovereign state (or polity), which has become the primary structural organ of modernization.

> The transfer of sovereignty from a colonial regime to an independent one is more than a mere shift of power from foreign hands to national ones : it is a transformation of the whole pattern of political life, a metamorphosis of subjects into citizens . . . Much of this . . . takes the form of an obsessive concern with the relations of one's tribe, region or whatever to a center of power . . . growing rapidly more active . . . Thus, it is the very process of the formation of a sovereign civil state that . . . stimulates sentiments of parochialism, communalism, racialism, and so on because it introduces into society a valuable new prize over which to fight and a frightening new force with which to contend.[27]

In 1973, Geertz revised his original article, which was written ten years earlier, and he stressed that "primordial-civil" divisions and interactions are as present in so-called modern nations as they are in so-called "developing states."[28] It is still widely assumed

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[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 154.
[26] Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution," *op. cit.*, p. 269.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 270.
[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 260-261.

that "modernity" implies secularisation, the disappearance of religion. When one views the world, however, it seems—at least to me—that modernizing processes have brought a new vitality to many traditional religions and cultures. Primordial sentiments are often being strengthened.

The vast and sprawling nation of India faces a challenge to its secular ideals from narrow neo-Hinduism, on the one hand, and, on the other, Islamic renewal. Regional and ethnic subnationalisms, such as that of the Sikhs of the Punjab, also break forth from the simmering soil of the sub-continent.

A study concerned with group identity cannot completely ignore "personality systems." No one has popularized the term "identity" more than has the psychologist Erik Erikson. He has said, "The problem of identity is that it must establish a continuity between a society's past and future."[29] This is reminiscent of Bellah's comment on the necessity for balancing "continuity and change, identity and openness, and memory and receptivity." A disciple of Erikson, Robert J. Lifton has written :

> Youth confronts us with the simple truth, too often ignored by psychologists and historians alike, that every individual life is bound up with the whole of human history . .. Those in their teens and twenties find themselves entering, sometimes with the explosive enthusiasm of the new arrival, into the realm of historical ideas.[30]

Groups which have been marginal to society often enter into history especially explosively, whatever the ages of the individuals involved, although youth may be the most explosive. These groups and individuals, long invisible to history, have a special problem. They need a useable past—a sense of continuity—if they are to "enter into history" and have an effective psychological base for cultural and political action. But for these hewers of wood and drawers of water—without whose sweat and labour no civilization could have flourished—the history they seek to enter

[29] Robert I. Evars, *Dialogues with Erik Erikson* (New York : Dutton, 1969), p. 35.

[30] Robert Jay Lifton, "Youth ard History : Individual Change in Post-War Japan," *The Challenge of Youth*, ed. Erik Erikson, New York : Doubleday, 1965, p. 260.

is usually history as interpreted by the elite. This history often symbolizes to the emerging groups their exploitation by those elites. Thus, they must create their own identity from selected and reinterpreted elements of the previously accepted version of that past. This process of an awakening consciousness, of selection and reinterpretation of cultural symbols, demonstrates both the economic and affective bases of primordial sentiments.

In this study, primordial sentiments will be utilized as a theoretical and methodological tool to chronicle and analyse the "entry into history" of a particular people. It is necessary to stress again, however, that I do not see these "attachments" or "givens" as being only elements from the past. They can be revived or even created by the processes of modernisation. The use of primordial sentiments as a theoretical and analytic tool immediately erases *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* as a chronological dichotomy and demonstrates the interpenetration and interdependence of tradition and modernity. Perhaps anthropologist Conrad Arensberg has said it most simply and succinctly : "Modernization proceeds as much by accommodating old and new together as by sweeping the old aside."[31] Later he mentions the importance of identifying "persistences and transformations in the wake of worldwide modernizing pressures" and he remarks that many groups are "not necessarily abandoning but rather expanding their ancient ways."[32] Identifying these "persistences and transformations"—and expansions—in one specific geographic area in India is a major goal of my study.

My next theoretical tool, Sanskritisation, comes from another social scientist, anthropologist M. N. Srinivas. It first appeared in Srinivas' 1952 book, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India.* In that book, Srinivas coined the concept of "spread." He analysed Hinduism by dividing it into geographical spread, vertical spread, and horizontal spread.[33] Geographical spread includes All-India Hinduism, regional Hinduism, and local Hinduism. As the area of spread decreases the number of cultural

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[31] Conrad Arensberg, "Foreword," Owen M. Lynch, *The Politics of Untouchability*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1969, p. ix.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. x.
[33] M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*, Bombay : Asia Publishing House, 1965. The following discussion is drawn from Chapter 7, especially pp, 213-228.

and ritual forms shared by the population increases and *vice versa*. Vertical spread is composed of beliefs and practices shared by all in a given village or region. Horizontal spread consists of ritual or cultural forms shared by the same or similar castes in different parts of India.

This concept of horizontal spread led to Srinivas' term, Sanskritisation, bringing a diachronic (historic) as well as synchronic dimension into his analysis. Basically, Srinivas identified All-India Hinduism with the corpus of Sanskrit scriptures and the ritual practices of the Brahmins. It is Brahminic horizontal spread. Using Redfield and Singer's terminology, All-India Hinduism is the Great Tradition of India with the Brahmins as the "learned specialists." For Srinivas, Sanskritisation is the historical process through which Great Traditional ideas and forms spread through the rest of the society. In later writings he has moved away from his exclusive emphasis on the Brahmins as the main carriers and catalysts of this continuing process and now identifies locally "dominant castes" as providing the models for, and the intermediaries between, the Brahminic tradition and local traditions. A relatively recent Srinivas definition calls Sanskritisation

> the process by which a low caste . . . takes over the customs, ritual, beliefs . . . and style of life of a high . . . caste . . It normally presupposes either an improvement in the economic or political position of the group concerned or a higher group self-consciousness resulting from its contact with a source of the "Great Tradition" of Hinduism.[34]

Thus, Srinivas has also adopted the "Great Tradition"—"Little Tradition" model and, while emphasising its cultural dimension, he also includes the social structural.

Sanskritization has proved to be a useful, if controversial, concept. It provides a way of perceiving the continuity and unity underlying the pluralistic culture of India and it stresses the ever-changing nature of Indian tradition. I mentioned above that Singer has pointed out that novelty has always been integrated

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[34] M. N. Srinivas, "The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization," *India and Ceylon : Unity and Diversity*, ed. Philip Mason, London : Oxford University Press, 1967, pp. 67-8.

into the Indian tradition, but innovation is justified by linking it to tradition.

The relation of Sanskritisation to modernization is problematic, however. Srinivas has linked the two processes together. While Sanskritisation has been going on throughout Indian history, he felt it increased in rapidity under British rule. "The development of communications carried Sanskritization to areas previously inaccessible, and the spread of literacy carried it to groups very low in the caste hierarchy."[35] Moreover, Srinivas feels that Sankritisation usually precedes modernisation. Agehananda Bharati is even more vehement: "When people in South Asia 'modernise' they can enter into any phase of technological innovation provided they have undergone the process of Sanskritisation."[36] But Srinivas sees problems: "Yet another problem .... is the reality of a long-term conflict between Sanskritisation and Westernisation."[37] It might result in "the disappearance of Hinduism altogether."[38] But he has also written, "The assumption of a simple and direct opposition between the two and of the ultimate triumph of Westernisation, I find too simple a hypothesis."[39] With Sanskritisation, I am obviously dealing again with nascent theory, a heuristic device, but the interrelationships between the theoretical concepts "Sanskritisation" and "modernisation" are a key focus of this study.

There is a more serious difficulty with Srinivas's description of Sanskritisation, however, and it is one upon which no scholar seems to have commented. As was pointed out earlier, Srinivas tied the concept to the "Great Tradition" of Redfield. This has meant that the Great Traditional has been emphasised by these scholars and there has been almost no exploration of the Little Tradition—even though Singer and Srinivas (and certainly Redfield) feel the links between the two are crucial. The Little Tradition, left in limbo, therefore means different things to various scholars. For anthropologists such as Agehananda Bharati it

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[35] *Op. cit.*, p. 48.
[36] A. Bharati, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
[37] M. N. Srinivas, "The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization," *op. cit.*, p. 82.
[38] M. N. Srinivas, "A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization," *op. cit.*, p. 60.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

means "the village, the community in isolation."[40] This is certainly the way Redfield meant it. For a religion scholar such as Philip Ashby, it becomes the "folk tradition" and folk Hinduism can be composed of local gods, disease goddesses, ghosts and spirits, etc. and/or the *Ithihasas*, the Puranas, and regional worship centred around great temples.[41] The unclassifiable but brilliant linguist-poet, A. K. Ramanujan writes,

> The "great tradition" in India would be interregional, pan-Indian ; its vehicle Sanskrit. The "little tradition" would consist of many regional traditions carried by the regional languages. It should not be forgotten that many of the regional languages and cultures themselves . . . have long traditions divisible into ancient and modern historically, "classical" and "folk" . . . synchronically . . . Still, taken in the large, one may speak of pan-Indian Sanskritic "great" traditions and many regional 'little' traditions.[42]

Both Ashby and Ramanujan sense the problem and in their search for the intermediary links, mention the region, but they then either identify the region with the Little Tradition (Ramanujan) or confuse the Little Tradition with more reflective regional elements (Ashby). A return to Srinivas's concept of spread would dissolve this difficulty. Vertical geographic spread provides common ritual and cultural forms in a given region. The region would then become the centre for Singer's "intermediary specialists and institutions which act as channels of transmission between 'higher' and 'lower' levels of tradition."

Anthropologists, linguists, historians, and political scientists have for several years viewed the region as an important unit for studying Indian civilization. In 1966 Duke University held a "Symposium on Regionalism in South Asia." Scholars from many disciplines attended, especially anthropologists and historians. None were religionists. But the anthropologist-historian dialogue was helpful to both and can aid religion scholars also. Bernard Cohn, an anthropologist, separated the geographic term "region" from

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[40] Agehananda Bharati, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[41] Philip Ashby, *Modern Trends in Hinduism*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1974, pp. 19-24.

[42] A. K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva*, Baltimore : Penguin, 1973, p. 23.

> regionalism—a conscious or unconscious development of symbols, behaviours, and movements, which will mark off groups within some geographic boundary from others in other regions for political, economic, or cultural ends.[43]

For Cohn, Indian regionalism "begins with modernisation and Westernisation, intensified in the twentieth century by the rise of the nationalist movement."[44] Burton Stein, a leading South Asian historian, took issue with this, arguing

> that the "sense" of region and the manipulation of symbols, behaviours, and movements in most cases goes back to the twelfth century in the activity of *bhakti* sects . . . or perhaps as early as the tenth century. In Tamilnad (one region) one can find the process of regionalism working during the *Sangam Era*, *c.* third century A.D.[45]

Thus, the synchronic approach of the anthropologist was deepened by the more diachronic emphasis of the historian. For the scholar of religion the challenge is posed of analysing the manipulation of religious symbols in a given region diachronically—that is, in terms of tradition and modernity, and synchronically—in terms of Great and Little Traditions, which in India will involve the process of Sanskritisation.

The geographic region upon which I will focus is Tamil India or Tamil Nadu (the land of the Tamils). It is an area of roughly 50,000,000 people located at the extreme south-eastern tip of India. Bordered by the Bay of Bengal on the east, the Indian Ocean on the south, and the Western Ghats (mountains) on the west, it has, as Stein's quotation suggested, a long and colourful history. It is open to the north, however, and shares in pan-Indian civilization. The name "Tamil" comes from its language, oldest of the four major Dravidian languages of South India, glorying in a literary tradition stretching back more than two thousand years.

Under British rule, Tamil Nadu was the Tamil-speaking area of the old Madras Presidency. In post-Independence India, the

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[43] Bernard S. Cohn, "Regions Subjective and Objective," *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies : An Explanatory Study*, ed. Robert I. Crane, Durham : Duke University Press, 1967, p. 21.

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] Burton Stein, "Comments," Crane, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

Presidency was known as Madras State and after the State's Reorganisation Act of 1956, the state was limited to the Tamil-speaking portion. In 1968, this area was officially renamed Tamil Nadu, in response to the growth of primordial sentiments—regionalism. There has occurred in Tamil Nadu a process of political, cultural, and social mobilisation which has influenced and been influenced by the ethos and world view of the Tamils. Two main rivers of history have merged to bring about this mobilisation. The first is the rise of Tamil self-awareness or ethnicity. Three smaller streams have flowed into this river. First, is the renaissance of the Tamil language and literature. Second, the rise of "Dravidian" racial consciousness, stimulated by varying interpretations of recent archeological discoveries, especially in the Indus Valley. Third, has been the occurrence of political-cultural antagonism directed against the formerly dominant Brahmins.

The second main river has been the emergence of a "Dravidianism," an ideology composed of a conglomeration of positivism drawn from such disparate figures as Robert Ingersoll, Thomas Paine, and Karl Marx, coupled with a reinterpretation of a Tamil world view and ethos based upon a selective appropriation of symbols found in ancient Tamil literature and history. These ideas and symbols have been promoted in contemporary mass literature, cinemas, and dramas by talented political leaders. A political party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) combined these two rivers and rode the resulting floodcrest to victory in Tamil Nadu in the 1967 All-India elections. This support was reaffirmed in an even more sweeping triumph in 1971. After that the movement split into two factions—the DMK and the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of cinema actor M. G. Ramachandran. The power of the renaissance transcends any party, however, since even the major opposition in the state adopted many of the renaissance themes. The movement seems an amalgam of several of Bellah's categories. It is a romantic nationalism which also stresses radical socialism. It is reformist and articulates a certain hostility to traditional elites, but it creates its own "pseudosacred" tradition out of Tamil history.

Milton Singer, in his study of intermediary links between Great and Little Traditions, decided to concentrate on major

cities. When, in his studies of Madras City—the major metropolis and capital of Tamil Nadu—he ran into a distinctively Tamil regional tradition, he didn't know quite what to do with it. Failing to see the region as the most important intermediary, and not really interested in Little or non-Sanskritic traditions, he "solved" the problem by positing another Great Tradition.

Writing of the Dravidian movement he said, it

> not only seeks to validate modernising changes with archaic models but also attempts to construct an alternate model of a Great Tradition . . . The significance of the Dravidian movement lies . . . in its use of the modern techniques of propaganda and political organisation to propagate a cultural ideology and model of a Dravidian Great Tradition and to make it the cultural basis for a successful political party.[46]

In another context, he comments on the movement's "outspoken and sometimes violent anti-Brahmin, anti-Hindu attacks."[47] Thus, the anthropologist who has done more than any other to help us see that "the unity of Hinduism . . . is to be found . . . in the continuities . . . that connect the rituals and beliefs of the villager with those of the . . . urbanite, one region with another, and the educated with the uneducated"[48] casts a very significant regional movement adrift from all-India history and culture. It is, for him, not even a Little Tradition, which then would at least have links with the Great Tradition. Instead, it is an alternative Great Tradition, divorced from the processes of Sanskritisation and from Indian history. Moreover it is "anti-Hindu."

However surprising it is that Singer does this, it is ever more unsettling to find M. N. Srinivas doing almost the same thing. He has written,

> Sanskritic ideology. . . .emerged as the most prestigeful of indigenous ideologies. However with the development of regional self-consciousness in the twentieth century there was an attempt in several Indian languages to discard Sanskrit words and phrases. This "purification" movement went

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[46] Milton Singer, *When A Great Tradition Modernizes, op. cit.*, pp. 399-401.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 226.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

> furthest in Madras. . . This view found powerful advocates in. . . .the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.. . . . Along with a great deal of obscurantism, parochialism, and incitement of hatred toward Brahmins. . . the DMK propagated a rational outlook and even atheism.[49]

One finds it hard to believe that this evaluation comes from the distinguished scholar who provided us with the conceptual tools of regional spread and Sanskritisation. Even these two historically minded anthropologists somehow forget history—or at least history that is not primarily Great Traditional—but this is exactly why a historian of religion can make a contribution to anthropology's new concerns with classical civilizations.

Even Agehananda Bharati, who believes that in India Sanskritisation must always precede modernisation, exempts the Dravidian movement :

> There is a recent exception to this general rule, one resting on a kind of inverse Sanskritization. The Dravida Kazhagam and Munnetra Kazhagam of Tamilnad reject any connection with the Sanskrit cultural base. Gods with Hindu names are not accepted and the images of such Sanskritic gods as Ganesha are. . .incinerated. . . Yet, even this process derives its inspiration from a model—there is a standard literary configuration at the base of such induced culture change. In all other parts of India Sanskrit remains the pattern ; it is only in the highly politicised Tamilian south where Tamil and Dravidian form the teleological matrix.[50]

The religion scholar can return to Srinivas' original insight of perceiving the region as a crucial nexus for viewing the inter-connections and intermediaries between Redfield's and Singer's Great and Little Traditions. With a special sensitivity for meaning-ful symbols, the religionist can then view the ways any major regional movement manipulates these traditional symbols to articulate its cultural ideology. In the case of the DMK one should also remember the historian Burton Stein's comment that in Tamil Nadu regionalism goes back at least as far as the third

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[49] M. N. Srinivas, " The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization," *op. cit.*, p. 79.
[50] Agehananda Bharati, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

century A.D. Viewed historically and synchronically, the DMK will look quite different from the way it appears to Srinivas, Singer and Bharati. It will be seen as fostering and participating in a regional variant of All-India civilization, strengthening Tamilisation (or Tamil ethnicity or vertical geographic spread) and Sanskritisation (or horizontal spread) at the same time. In the process, the movement will be seen as continuing to strengthen a regional variant of Hinduism.

In my study, then, as a primary way to answer my central question of how Hinduism is responding to—and influencing—modern change, I plan to utilise the tool of primordial sentiments to outline the creation of what Singer calls the " Dravidian Great Tradition " (and what Bharati terms an " alternate model "). Secondly, however, I will attempt to demonstrate that the All-India Great Tradition, or the process of Sanskritisation, is more relevant to Tamil Nadu than Srinivas, Singer, or Bharati feel it is. This " Dravidian Great Tradition" is a catalyst and reflection of past history and present modernisation. It also represents a vibrant regional Hinduism, rationalizing Little Traditions with the All-India tradition and, in the process, continuing the age-old processes of Sanskritisation. But it is a Sanskritisation in which the region plays the crucial intermediary role.

Already, I have begun to slip from discussion of the theoretical tools I will use, into questions of methodology. It should be clear that I will rely on both anthropological and historical approaches. Clifford Geertz has helped me with method as well as with theory. He has written that anyone concerned with the problem of " how countries got to where they are from where they were " must " do history backward. "[51] He quotes the philosopher, Kierkegaard :

"Life is lived forward but understood backward." For the historical sociologist, whose concern is general explanation, as opposed to the descriptive historian whose concern is faithful portrayal, doing history backward is the proper way to do it.[52]

H. Stuart Hughes, from the standpoint of the historian, uses similar

[51] Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
[52] *Ibid.*

terms. Writing of three ways to approach intellectual history, he says,

> The first is to deal with popular ideas and practices—with the whole. . . . realm of. . . .community sentiments. Historians interested in this sort of material proceed in much the same fashion in which anthropologists approach the study of "primitive" culture. Hence the efforts of such historians have quite properly been labelled "retrospective cultural anthropology."[53]

My study will combine this "historical sociology"—or "retrospective cultural anthropology" with "descriptive history." My historical descriptions will interact with my knowledge of Tamil Nadu's contemporary scene. I am forced to "do history backward" because this is the way it is done by contemporary Tamils as they confront the challenges of change and make their entry into history. For me, their view of their history will guide me more than my own study of that history. But my own study will make itself felt. I will concentrate on the years 1949 to the end of 1972. 1949 was the year the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was founded and it was in October of 1972 that the DMK suffered its major schism, diluting its influence (but not the influence of its ideas). However, because of my emphasis on history much material prior to 1949 is included.

Clifford Geertz, in his attempt to combine anthropological and historical methods, turns to historical personalities to illustrate a "classical style," (a traditional ethos). Of these historical personages, he says, "Whatever they originally were or did as actual persons has long since been dissolved into an image. . ."[54] in short they have become "metaphors. . .human recapitulations of a social transformation."[55] In viewing more recent periods, he continues this emphasis on individuals—persons who "if they did not wholly make the history of their times. . .embodied it. . . They sum up more than they ever were."[56] Bellah has commented that cultural change forces certain men to grapple

[53] H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, New York : Vintage, 1958, p. 9.
[54] Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[55] *Ibid.*, pp. 25-7.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

with serious questions of value. " For one who is interested in cultural change. . .such men are of the greatest significance. "[57] I have already mentioned Redfield and Singer's emphasis on the " literati " or " cultural brokers " who rationalise a Great Tradition out of orthogenetic Little Traditional materials or who create a heterogenetic Great Tradition from the encounter of two orthogenetic civilizations. All of this had driven me to an emphasis on biographical method.

Geertz wrote of individuals acting as symbols or " metaphors. " He wrote that " sacred symbols " are those which link and mutually reinforce an individual's or a group's world view and ethos—their religious culture. This has led to a second major emphasis in my method : a concentration on sacred (or meaningful) symbols. For Geertz, and for myself, " symbol is used for any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception. The conception is the symbol's meaning. "[58]

The most important thing about symbols, for this study, is that they are not just passive reflections of the way persons or societies perceive reality ; they also influence and stimulate action. This is why Geertz stresses symbols as linking world view and ethos. Symbols give meaning (conceptual form) " to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves. "[59] Or as Geertz adds, they are not just models " of " reality, but models " for " it. They are constitutive as well as reflective, thus stimulating social action, not just mirroring it.

In this study, I shall concentrate on certain individuals as " human recapitulations of social transformations, " embodiments of history. In the process of viewing them I shall emphasise the symbols which they have selected to articulate their sentiments and conceptions, especially their idioms of transition which they utilise when confronting cultural change. This is because I see the writings and rhetoric of these literati (or brokers, or culture heroes) as symbolising the ways they view themselves and their

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57 Robert Bellah, " Ienaga Saburo and the Search for Meaning in Modern Japan," *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, ed. Marius B. Jansen, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 370.

58 Clifford Geertz, " Religion as Cultural System," *The Religious Situation*, 1968, ed. Donald R. Cutler, Boston : Beacon Press, 1968, p. 641.

59 Clifford Geertz, " Religion as a Cultural System," *op. cit.*, p. 643.

societies. They call up images in which a society is imagined and articulated and then the society recognises itself in the images that have been presented. For me, private imaginations and public feelings are inextricably connected, especially when the imagination belongs to a recognised culture hero. And private imaginations can only be publicly atriculated through symbols.

Geertz recognises what every participant-observer should realize, namely that it is impossible to get compeletely inside the minds of the subject. His qualification is important :

> Anthropological writings are themselves interpretations and second and third order ones to boot. (By definition, only a 'native' makes first order ones : it's *his* culture.) They are thus fictions. . .in the sense they are 'something made' . . . .not that they are false.[60]

But this is a problem that can be present for the historian, also. A pioneering phenomenological historian of religion, W. Brede Kristensen, wrote at the turn of the century that,

> The historians seeks to understand, and he is able to do that in an approximate way, approximate but no more. By means of empathy, he tries to relieve in his own experience, that which is 'alien'. ... This imaginative reexperiencing of a situation strange to us is a form of representation, not reality itself. . . Here we see the limit to the validity of historical research..[61]

Kristensen, however, immediately added, "But recognising a limit of validity is not to deny the value of this research."[62] History and anthropology face the same problem but an awareness of the "fictitious" nature of the researcher's interpretations, knowing they are "representations" (symbols), is an important safeguard in itself.

To gain a deeper understanding of this participant-observer method as it was exemplified in my own research, I offer this small example from my field notes :

> I hadn't really wanted to go to the wedding reception. It was

[60] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[61] W. Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, trans. John Carman, The Hague : Nijhoff, 1960, p. 7.
[62] *Ibid.*

hot, I was tired, and the fifteen-mile bus trip to a neighbouring town just to welcome a returning bridegroom didn't appeal to me. Such formalities are taken very seriously in India, however, and my policy was to go anywhere I was asked if it was at all possible. The bumpy, dusty bus ride was as dull as I'd expected and, even though my Indian friends and I were late, the meal was far from ready. The bridegroom, a newspaper and magazine agent of modest circumstances, had a small house already much overcrowded so we were moved to a larger home to wait until the food was ready. As is usual at these affairs, I was soon the centre of a cluster of bright-eyed, dark-skinned children. I turned to one especially handsome lad and asked his name. 'Ingersoll,' he shyly replied. Immediately my flagging, interest spurted into new life. Not Muthu, or Rajamani, or Abdul, or even Joseph—but Ingersoll. I knew the boy must have been named for Robert (Bob) Ingersoll, American rationalist spellbinder of the last century and one of the present-day inspirers of the Dravidian movement.

Sure enough, the father of the boy turned out to be a fervent follower of the movement and a few judicious questions started a discussion. A young Muslim high school teacher joined us and we all adjourned to the flat roof of the house and there, sitting on colourful canvas *jammakalams*, with a nearly-full moon shedding a mellow light over us, the loud-speakers from below engulfing us in the sounds of the latest Tamil cinema music, we had a growingly impassioned discussion.

I was trying to get information but my hosts were continually involving me in the argument. In some ways it was like a college "bull session" but here the ideas expressed were part of a dynamic cultural upsurge : "Why do I have to believe in a god ?" "Darwin has shown God isn't necessary for creation." "I can be a good man without believing in God." "The upper caste Brahmins have used religion in India for centuries to oppress the rest of us." "Science and reason can free us from all this exploitation and help make Tamil Nadu great." On and on it went. Two hours later (and three hours late) the message was brought that the meal was ready and we reluctantly ended our dialogue.

Literally hundreds of small encounter such as this, as well as some more structured one, deepened my awareness of Tamil Nadu's changing religious culture in ways that no amount of reading could have done. And in the process I was not only continually learning, but I was continually being changed. Yet, I was reading also. As will be seen, while this study is heavily descriptive, almost phenomenological at times, it draws as heavily on historical study as on contemporary interpretation.

My theoretical tools—primordial sentiments, Sanskritisation, modernisation, world view and ethos—are interwoven into my anthropological and historical method. I have already confessed that most of these conceptual tools are only nascent theories, but they have been useful as heuristic devices. In using them to examine religious change in Tamil Nadu, I hope they have not only aided me in better understanding Tamil Nadu's religious culture but also, in the process, have become more refined themselves.

The organisation of this study is relatively straightforward. After this introductory chapter, I present a historical sketch of Tamil Nadu from its ancient beginnings until the mid-nineteenth century. This historical outline is primarily an attempt to delineate Tamil Nadu's " classical style. " Next is a chapter on the rise of the Tamil renaissance. This is an extremely important period for anyone concerned with contemporary Tamil Nadu, but it does not form the major focus of the study. This is partly true because I stress later developments ; also, Eugene F. Irschick has done an excellent historical-political study of this period.[63] In that pivotal chapter, I attempt to rely on my own research, rather than repeat Irschick's and my own emphasis on religious developments gives my interpretations a slightly different tone from his. Chapters Four, Five and Six are the heart of the study, attempting to perceive religious change through three " human recapitulations of social transformations, " three embodiments of recent Tamil history. The following chapter concentrates on two contemporary religious leaders, representations of Tamil Nadu's regional Hinduism. My final chapter is a summary which uses a present-day Tamil Hindu as my last " human metaphor. "

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[63] Eugene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India, The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism,* 1916-1929, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1969.

CHAPTER II

THE CLASSICAL ETHOS OF TAMIL NADU

Bernard Cohn, wrote of regionalism that its first prerequisite is

> a pool of symbols which may be drawn upon and around which the content. . . .of regionalism can be formed for a particular region. . . At any moment in the present or the recent past. . . the possible symbol pool in any region from which selection can be made seems to be. . .vast.[1]

He added,

> It would appear that the set of well-established literary-religious symbols in Tamilnad. . . .is the most extensive set found in India.[2]

As already stated, my study is primarily concerned with some of the sacred symbols selected by culture heroes (or literati or cultural brokers) of Tamil Nadu as they confront the crises and opportunities of change and attempt to balance " identity with openness, memory with receptivity. "

Although the stress is on the present, some knowledge of Tamil Nadu's history is essential if one is to understand the symbol pool from which contemporary leaders draw. This chapter attempts a historical sketch of Tamil Nadu, but, in a sense, it does " do history backward " because it will stress some of the cultural phenomena from which the contemporary heroes and brokers have drawn. And they had a vast symbol pool from which to draw. This survey is not primarily an attempt to establish the " truth " of Tamil Nadu's contemporary idioms of transition. It is mainly concerned with providing an essential backdrop. At the end of the chapter, in order to gain a greater diachronic understanding of the interactions between Tamilisation and Sanskritisation, I shall utilize a few examples which I have plucked from Tamil Nadu's extensive pool of symbols.

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1 Bernard Cohn, " Regions Subjective and Objective," *op. cit.*, pp. 22-5.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

On the most elementary level of discussion, India is often divided into three main geographical divisions : the Mountain Zone, the Indo-Gangetic Plain, and Central and Southern India.[3] This is a great oversimplification but it is viable if one remembers that within each of the three areas regional identities took form around agricultural core areas. From the earliest times it seems that people gravitated to these fertile cores and these became centres for the growth of distinctive linguistic and political regions. In the far South, the Cauvery River delta provided such a core. Around this, Tamil Nadu has been developing its own identity for more than two thousand years.

Tamil Nadu is on the extreme southern wedge of the Indian peninsula and covers an area just over six hundred miles in length at its greatest extent, bounded on the west and northwest by the eight thousand feet high mountains that block off the Deccan plateau from the deep south. To the east lies the Bay of Bengal.

> (Tamil Nadu's) history. . . . . .does not follow the course of events in North India for from the beginning its activities were controlled by its peninsula character and were more oriented toward the sea.[4]

On the opposite slopes of the western mountains nestles the tiny but turbulent state of Kerala, itself once part of Tamil culture but freed for eight hundred years by its own geography and cultural uniqueness. Between Tamil Nadu and Kerala there are only two good passageways, the northern Palghat Gap near the modern industrial city of Coimbatore and, in the deep south, Kanyakumari (Cape Comorin), thrusting its pointed, palm-fringed nose into the sea.

Tamil Nadu finds itself shut off by the western hills from the monsoon rains which blow across the Arabian Sea but Kerala, because of those same mountains, gets a heavy rainfall. Tamil Nadu obtains its main rains during October to December when the northeast monsoon comes sweeping in from the Bay of Bengal. This rain is much less predictable than the southwest monsoon,

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[3] Bernard Cohn, *India : The Social Anthropology of a Civilization*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey : Prentice-Hall, 1971, pp. 8-23.

[4] K. M. Pannikar, *Geographical Factors in India's History*, Bombay : Bharatya Vidya Bhavan, 1955, p. 27.

however, and drought is common to Tamil Nadu.[5] Another geographical peculiarity should be remembered when one surveys India's crowded history. All the main rivers of India flow from west to east. This west to east flow, in a country which lies north to south, has created what K. M. Pannikar calls "horizontal areas" with little connection between them.[6] This has aided the growth of regional consciousness.

The attempt to understand early history in all of India is enlightened guess work, at best. What we know comes from ancient literature, an occasional foreign traveller, and from modern archaeological study. Fortunately, the Tamils have a literary output of high quality and quantity and of considerable antiquity. Equally fortunately, Indian archaeology is slowly but steadily casting increasing light on the subcontinent's creative but confusing past.

Archaeology, however, leaves an ambivalent record. South India abounds with megaliths, crudely built stone structures often fulfilling a funerary function. Contemporaneous with these megaliths, and often discussed along with them, are extensive urn burial fields, the most notable in Tamil Nadu being at Adichannallur near modern Tirunelveli. All sorts of theories have arisen from the discovery of these megaliths and graves. Over a hundred years ago the British archaeologist Meadows Taylor described them as the works of "the great Aryan nomadic tribes of the Eastern Celts or Scythians."[7] The Diffusionists tried to demonstrate that they spread from Egypt.[8] More recently, the respected Mortimer Wheeler has categorically written that the megalith builders were Dravidian speakers.[9] B. and R. Allchin, careful and contemporary, confess to confusion and can only say they "appear as a developing complex with several streams of influence combining in them."[10] They list at least four such sources of

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[5] For an excellent survey of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, stressing demography's effect on social structural differences, see Joan P. Mencher, "Kerala and Madras: A Comparative Study of Ecology and Social Structure," *Ethnology*, vol. V, No. 2, April, 1966, pp. 135-171.

[6] Pannikar, *op. cit.*

[7] See B. and R. Allchin, *The Birth of Indian Civilization*, Baltimore: Penguin, 1968, p. 229.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Mortimer Wheeler, *Early India and Pakistan*, Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala Sons and Co., Ltd., 1959, p. 169.

[10] B. and R. Allchin, *op. cit.*

influence : (*a*) Central Asia, perhaps related to Indo-Aryan speaking immigrants ; (*b*) indigenous Neolithic Deccan ; (*c*) maritime contacts with the Middle East ; and (*d*) local development in peninsula India itself.[11]

Clearly, all this is not much help. What is known is that at Adichannallur, the best examined site, the objects found are made of gold, bronze, and iron, so the Iron Age had dawned by this time in South India. But bronze is especially prominent. The earliest date for the Iron Age in the South is probably 950 B.C. but the Allchins give a deep insight into the nature of this Southern civilization by pointing out that very little change seems to have come with the advent of iron. " One is left with the feeling of a remarkable conservatism among the population of South India throughout the period."[12] This conservatism was to remain. The eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D. were to see the birth of the magnificant Chola bronzes. In no other medium did Tamil artistry so excel.

Exterior historical sources cast valuable light on Tamil Nadu's past. The three major kingdoms of the Tamils, the Cheras (on the west coast), the Pandyas (centred in Madurai), and the Cholas (having as their base of operations the Cauvery delta), were in existence by the time the Tamils were first written off. A North Indian writer, Kayayana, in his work *Varttika* of the fourth century B.C., mentions the three Southern kingdoms.[13] Megasthenes, who was sent by the Archaemenid ruler Seleukas to the court of the Mauryan emperor Chandragupta around 302 B.C., writes of the " Pandae " kingdom.[14] Strabo, writing around 20 A.D., comments that Pandyan kings sent ambassadors to the Roman emperor Augustus in 30-20 B.C. and Pliny (77 A.D.) mentions the " emporium of Modoura. " Ptolemy (150 A.D.) wrote of " Modoura, the capital of the Pandion. "[15]

These references are important for they point to a fact already referred to, that while the early Tamil rulers did not usually extend

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.
[12] B. and R. Allchin, *op. cit.*, p. 232.
[13] Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, Madras : Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 67.
[14] S. A. Q. Husani, *The History of the Pandya Country*, Karaikudi : Selvi Padipakkam, 1962, p. 6.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

themselves beyond the southern plains, they were active on the sea and the sea brought them prosperity. Early Tamil literature is filled with allusions to maritime trade. In a Tamil classic of (perhaps) the fifth century A.D. the famous port of Puhar at the mouth of the Cauvery is described :

> The sun shone over the open terraces, over the warehouses near the harbour, and over the turrets with windows like the eyes of deer. . . The onlooker's attention was arrested by the sight of the abode of the Yavanas[16] whose prosperity never waned. At the harbour were to be seen sailors from distant lands.[17]

In this case, archaeology and literature happily corroborate one another. The greatest discovery for this period is Arikamedu, near modern Pondicherry on the east coast. In 1937, archaeological excavations began and they have continued up to the present time. A substantial trading port has been uncovered and the most useful finds have been large quantities of Italian red-glazed "Arretine" ware and of Mediterranean *amphorae* which probably had contained wine. Dating for this rather magnificant early "factory" is the first two centuries A.D.[18] Tamil Nadu offered many products that the West desired : pearls, coral, pepper, ginger, cinnamon, ivory. As is well-known, the drain on the gold of the Roman Empire in its trade with India was considerable. Diggings in Coimbatore District, two hundred and fifty miles southwest of Madras City, have produced more Roman coins than have all the excavations in all the rest of India put together. There are at least eleven hoards of first century A.D. Roman coins in that district alone.[19] That area, traditionally known as Kongunadu, was used in the trans-shipment of goods from the west to east coasts and was also the place where the boundaries of the three Tamil kingdoms met. In any event, Tamil Nadu's lucrative trade with the West is beyond dispute and this trade took a dramatic leap with the discovery of the regular monsoon winds. Wheeler, however, adds an important supplement to the Allchin's comment

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16 These were foreign traders, often Greek and Roman.

17 *Silappadikaram* quoted in Pannikar, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-4.

18 The best report of these excavations can be found in Mortimer Wheeler, *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers*, London : G. Bell and Sons, 1954, pp. 138-53.

19 *Ibid.*

on Southern conservatism : " For all the vigour of its impact, the Roman trade. . . had no appreciable or durable effect upon the cultures of the peninsula. "[20]

The Tamils, however, were exporting culture and were participating in exploration and trade of their own, " For over ten centuries after the beginning of the Christian era, Tamil Nadu was intimately involved culturally in Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaya . . . . "[21] and throughout Southeast Asia the results of this cultural infusion are visible today. This maritime activity reached its height in the glorious eleventh century when the Cholas, under the rule of Raja Raja and his son Rajendra, ruled supreme.

> As maritime powers, as controllers of the Cauvery rice bowl, Tamil empires stood on an impregnable economic base. Thus they were able to forestall Deccan incursions and to develop a political and cultural identity as strong and vital as any in India.[22]

The greatest resource for an understanding of the ethos or style of early Tamil culture comes from indigenous sources, however. In the nineteenth century a remarkable and vast body of ancient Tamil literature was brought to light. Later, the enormous controversy which surrounds the dating of this literature will be briefly examined, but there is no doubt of its originality and antiquity. This *Sanror seyyul* or " poetry of the noble ones " is usually known today by a more Sanskritic title, *Sangam* (group or assembly) poetry. Much has recently been written about it with the best exposition, in my opinion, having been done by a Sri Lanka Tamil scholar, K. Kailasapathy. Briefly, his argument is that this literature comes from an extensive oral tradition dating back to at least the first century B.C. It was codified much later but contains very ancient materials. Kailasapathy views it as " heroic poetry " representing an ethos of heroes or warriors and emerging at a time when clans or tribes were emerging into loosely-bound kingdoms.[23] In its present codified—or anthologised—form

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 149.

[21] Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

[22] Selig Harrison, *India, The Most Dangerous Decades*, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1960, p. 42.

[23] K. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, London : Oxford University Press, 1968.

it is marked by a complex and sophisticated symbolism whereby various flora and fauna and differing regions depict moods and feelings.[24]

The poetry is divided into *akam* (interior or love poetry) and *puram* (exterior or public poetry). Both reveal the warrior style but *akam* has the greater vogue because of its emphasis on passionate love. A typical *akam* poem, spoken in this case by a girl, goes as follows :

> Bigger than the earth, certainly,
> higher than the sky,
> more unfathomable than the waters
> is this love for this man
> of the mountain slopes
> where bees make rich honey
> from the flowers of the *kurinji*
> that has such black stalks.[25]

The type of flower mentioned and the relation to a mountain means, by the established poetic conventions, that this poem is concerned with the mood of the lover's union. The metaphor of the *kurinji* bush, which takes twelve years to bloom, places additional emphasis on symbolising a girl who has reached puberty.

For the purposes of this study, *puram* poetry is more crucial, however, for *puram* are about " good and evil, action, community, kingdoms, . . . "[26] Kailasapathy provides a passible translation from an oft-quoted woman bard :

> This woman, worthy of her warrior tribe, is truly endowed with rare courage. It was only the day before yesterday that her brother slew an elephant on the battlefield and fell fighting against the foes ; yesterday her husband was cut down in a bloody battle fighting the cattle raiders, and yet today, on hearing the war drum, she was filled with joy and

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[24] For Kailasapathy, the period of codification can be as late as 750-850 A.D. A. K. Ramanujan, another non-jingoistic scholar, feels it can be no later than the third century A.D. A. K. Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape*, Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1967, pp. 97-8.

[25] A. K. Ramanujan, trans., *The Interior Landscape*, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-9. I Am deeply indebted to Professor Ramanujan for his interpretations.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

> gave her only son a bright white cloth to wear, combed his hair, and placing a lance into his hand, bade him go to the battlefield.[27]

Here the heroic ethos is clearly demonstrated. Two key words seem to sum up this ethos : *nan* and *pukal*. Both are often used in the poems. *Nan* is what one feels about one's own actions. One can feel a sense of shame coming from his own failure, or from *pali*, the blame of others. If, however, he senses *nanum*, he feels good or honourable about his deed.[28] Another word which often occurs is *pukal* or glory and it is closely associated with *nanum*.[29] *Nanum* later may have become associa ed with *manam*, integrity or honour. Most traditional societies have some term for the concept of honour and for Tamil Nadu under the word *nanum* (and later *manam*) this concept has been crucial. Despite, or perhaps because of the heroic ethos, a broad and humanistic ethic can often be discerned in this early poetry. For example : " All the world is my place ; and all are my kith and kin. "[30]

There is much debate about this heroic poetry and its relation to Sanskrit. It is beyond doubt, although not dispute, that there are some Sanskrit words in even the earliest stratum of the poems as we now have them. An unprejudiced Western scholar who knows both Tamil and Sanskrit has written :

> The language of the *Eight Anthologies* (a *Sangam* work) clearly contains numerous Sanskrit loan words. . . Thus at the earliest period for which we have detailed information, the Tamils were already entering the general Aryan framework.[31]

Sanskritisation began early in Tamil Nadu, but there was a distinctive Tamil element also. S. K. Chatterji, the distinguished Bengali linguist, has put it best :

> The leaven of Indo-Aryan was working in Tamil as in all other Indian non-Aryan speech. But although Indo-Aryan

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[27] Kailasapathy, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 86-93.

[29] Xavier Thani Nayagam, " Ancient Tamil Poetry," *Eastern Horizon*, Hong Kong, Nos. 7 & 8, 1966, p. 79.

[30] R. Rangachari, trans. *An Anthology of Indian Literature*, K. Santhanam, ed. (Bombay : Bharatya Vidya Bhavan, 1969), p. 570.

[31] A. L. Basham, " Some Reflections on Dravidians and Aryans," *Bulletin of Traditional Cultures*, Madras : University of Madras, 1963, p. 226.

> ...words were being adopted...Tamil developed a literary mode of its own which is essentially South Dravidian.[32]

Xavier Thani Nayagam, Tamil professor at the University of Malaysia, has spoken of *Sangam* literature as being "predominantly secular and humanistic."[33] While there are humanistic elements present, it should be stressed that from the very earliest period of these poems, one finds the figure of Murugan, an ancient Tamil god, who seems to have originally been related to the hills. Thus, the term "secular" seems somewhat misleading. One of the most famous longer poems is the *Tirumurukarruppatai*, or *Being Led to Holy Murugan.* In the form in which it now appears, it is definitely post-heroic but there seems little doubt that Kailasapathy is correct when he calls it "an accretion of centuries."[34] There is no need to get into an argument, however, for Murugan appears in many other of the early poems. He was associated with priestesses and male diviners who were often "possessed" by spirits. Murugan's mother, the fearful goddess Korravai, is often connected with him. A fertility theme seems to underlie much of the imagery surrounding Murugan and Korravai.

It is necessary to balance the picture of "secularism" and "humanism" with a few references from the *Sangam* literature to this young and handsome god of the early Tamils :

> 'If Lord Murugan, who with his renowned broad hands destroyed those who would not heed his behests, is placated, this girl's suffering will be remedied.' The women of ancient wisdom said this as a truth. And so, at midnight the sacrificial floor was well-prepared. The spear was garlanded and to the loud singing in the temple, sacrifice was offered ; shapely red millet mixed with blood was spread and Murugan was invoked.[35]

In another example, the *kurinji* which—as was pointed out earlier—is often associated with fertility, is utilised :

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[32] Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *Languages and Literatures of Modern India*, Calcutta : Bengal Publishers, 1963, p. 306.
[33] X. Thani Nayagam, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
[36] Kaialaspathy, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
[35] Kailaspathy, trans., *Ibid.*, p. 62.

> The girls wearing *kurinji* flowers . . . worship with zeal . . . this god who is extremely handsome. . . They join their hands and embracing one another. . .indulge in . . . noisy dances and songs.[36]

Murugan is often connected to prophecy and the epithets applied to his diviners are also applied to the common lizard whose chirps are used to predict the future.[37]

Both sides of the *Sanror seyyul* —its heroic and humanistic emphases and its occasional references to shamanistic practices associated with Murugan—remain important for the Tamil world view and ethos. I have spent a fair amount of time on the *Sangam* period because this age has become a cornerstone of Tamil identity. It is the *arche*, the ancient touchstone, to which contemporary identity is linked.

The best known work in Tamil, however is the venerable *Tirukkural* (*Holy Couplets*) and it is definitely post-Heroic Age. It was probably written around the third Century A.D., although its dating is more hotly disputed than that of any other work. Tradition holds that it was written by a humble weaver, Valluvar, whose father was a Brahmin and mother an outcaste. This may symbolise the mixture of which the *Kural* is composed. All contemporary religious groups in Tamil Nadu (including some Christians) claim it is their own and it almost certainly contains much Jain (and perhaps Buddhist) influence. The most likely explanation is that it is a syncretistic work and represents a merging of several religious streams in the Tamil Nadu of that period. By the third century Jain and Buddhist monks were active in Tamil Nadu and there were also small colonies of Brahmins. Meanwhile, the *Sangam* tradition remained.

In 1,330 couplets (*kurals*) a set of enlightened ethical rules, a type of " Wisdom Literature, " is expounded in the *Kural*. The entire work is divided into three parts, echoing a well-known Sanskritic division : (1) *Aram* or *Dharma* (Skt.) for the householder and ascetic ; (2) *Porul* or *Artha* (Skt.) dealing with social and political economy ; and (3) *Inbam* or *Kama* (Skt.) concerned with

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

aesthetics and sensual love. While the division is Sanskritic the work breathes "a positive ethic of love and forgiveness."[38] And in the section on sensual love, *akam* lines are often reproduced.[39]

The work, although concerned with ethics, rarely engages in metaphysical speculation. It remains a great Tamil-Sanskritic synthesis. To select any individual couplets from the richness of the whole is to do the work a disservice, but perhaps the following four give a flavour of its ethos :

> They are great who fast and do penance
> But they who forgive wrongs are even greater.[40]
> Love is stronger than wine
> For the very thought of it intoxicates.[41]
> Vain is the kingdom where there are all good things,
> But no love between ruler and ruled.[42]
> To the learned man every country is his own country,
> and every town his own town.[43]

If some Jain influence can be perceived in the *Tirukkural*, it is much stronger in the *Silappadikaram* (*The Jewelled Anklet*), of (perhaps) the fifth centry A.D. By this time, several Jain ethical works had been written in Tamil and the Sanskritic concept of the epic poem, the *kavya*, was influencing Tamil poets. The *Silappadikaram* is the most famous of these epics. It tells the story of a merchant prince and his wife, Kovalan and Kannagi, who live in Puhar, the great seaport of the Chola Kingdom. Kovalan has an affair with Madhavi, a dancing girl, and loses all his wealth to her except for a pair of jewelled anklets. He and Kannagi leave the Chola Kingdom, guided by an ascetic Jain woman. When they reach Madurai, capital of the Pandyan Kingdom, Kovalan goes to

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[38] A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That was India*, New York : Grove Press, 1959, p. 339.

[39] Because of its erotic content, the third book of the *Kural* was left untranslated by the first translator into English. the Rev. W. H. Drew. He felt "it could not be translated into any European language without exposing the translator to infamy" *Tirukural*, Pope, Drew, Lazarus, and Elli:, trans, Tirunelveli : South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1958, p xxviii.

[40] Basham *Wonder*, *op cit.*, p. 339.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 468.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] Pope, Drew, Lazarus, and Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 107. This is one of the many verses that echo *Sangam* themes.

pawn one of the remaining anklets. However, the king's minister has stolen a similar anklet, but with a different gem inside, and lays the blame on Kovalan. The young merchant is killed by order of the king. Kannagi, the faithful wife, charges into the throne room and throws down the other anklet which breaks open revealing the jewel inside. The king falls dead and Kannagi tears off one breast and destroys the city of Madurai by fire. Later, she appears as the goddess in the Chera Kingom.[44]

In many ways, this is a very Sanskritised work. As a preamble —added by a later commentator—put it, the epic was written to illustrate " three eternal precepts : (1) Divine Law (*Dharma*) takes the form of death when a king goes astray from the path of duty ; (2) All must bow before a chaste and faithful wife ; (3) The ways of fate are mysterious and all actions are rewarded (*karma*). "[45]

These three Sanskritic concepts are clearly in the work. Yet the general outlines of the story were drawn from ancient Tamil folklore, perhaps related to a " mother goddess " theme. Hero and heroine are not from a courtly circle, but are merchants. (This reflects the "elective affinity" between Jainism and a growing merchant class). In the telling of the story, the life of all three Tamil kingdoms was revealed and there is much emphasis on descriptions of nature—a direct throwback to *Sangam* concerns. Above all, in many passages—especially those where Kovalan and Madhavi make love—entire segments of *akam* poetry are reproduced. The *Silappadikaram* is a creative synthesis of Tamilisation and Sanskritisation.

The next major period in Tamil Nadu's literary-religious history is the *Bhakti Age*. From the beginning of the 6th century a remarkable band of Vaishnavite (*Alvars*) and Saivite (*Nayanmars*) singers

> swept through South India with a flame of devotion to God conceived in personal forms ; their hymns were the means of a great revival of popular religion whose effects spread throughout the land.[46]

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[44] For a passable English rendering of the epic, see *Shilappadikaram*, trans. Alain Danielou, New York : New Directions, 1965.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 209.

[46] J. S. M. Hooper, *Hymns of the Alvars,* Calcutta : Association Press, 1929, p. xi.

This was the preaching of liberation through an ecstatic devotion (*bhakti*). Rulers and the masses were converted and Buddhism and Jainism virtually vanished, although the Hinduism which replaced them retained much of their influence.

A great deal has been written about the *bhakti* movement. It certainly was affected by the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Svetesvatara Upanishad*. Yet it had its own unique roots as well. A. L. Basham has a notable insight when he sees in that long composite poem on Murugan, the *Tirumurukarruppatai*, one of those indigenous roots. Near the end the worshipper meets Murugan face to face :

> When you see his face, praise him with joy,
> Worship him with joined palms, bow before him,
> so that his feet touch your head. . .
> Holy and mighty will be his form
> Rising to heaven, but his a sterner face
> Will be hidden, and he will show you
> The form of young man, fragrant and beautiful,
> And his words will be loving and gracious—
> " Don't be afraid, I knew you were coming. "[47]

Basham feels a new concept of love—*anbu* in Tamil—is here emerging. " The love of God. . . is reflected by the worshipper in love for his fellows."[48] I would add that it is not only a self-giving love which emerges in this movement, but also a profound sense of grace (*arul* in Tamil). Basham hints at this when he writes, " Moreover, the Tamil devotees often worshipped their God with a deep sense of sin and inadequacy, which is rarely to be found in contemporary Aryan literature. . . "[49] What seems to have happened is that the intense Tamil sensual passion revealed in early *akam* poetry had been refined under the ethical impact of Jain and Buddhist thought and then had burst forth in this ecstatic love for a transcendent and immanent God. *Pali* or shame had deepened into a sense of sin which only *arul* or grace could mitigate.

For the purposes of this survey, only four Nayanmars need be mentioned. Tradition says that two were Brahmins and two were

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[47] Quoted in Basham, *Wonder*, *op. cit.*, p. 330 from *Pattupattu*, trans. V. V. Chelliah, Madras : South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1962, pp. 285-90.

[48] Basham, *Wonder*, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

[49] *Ibid.*

high-caste non-Brahmins. Appar, also known as Tirunavukkarasu, and Sundarar were non-Brahmin Vellalas and Sambandar and Manikkavasagar were Brahmins. I will quote only one verse, from Manikkavasagar, but it catches the heritage of both *arul* and *anbu* which these great hymnists gave to the Tamil country.

> Into my vile body of flesh
> You came as though it were a temple of gold,
> And soothed me wholly and saved me,
> Oh Lord of Grace, Oh Gem Most Pure.
> Sorrow and birth and death and illusion
> You took from me and set me free,
> Oh Bliss, Oh Lignt ! I have taken refuge in you,
> And never can I be parted from you.[50]

In this verse, one can see how much has been borrowed from the North (" sorrow and birth and death and illusion "), but unique Tamil themes are clearly present and the movement gave much to the North, also. Selig Harrison caught some of the paradoxes of this " great awakening " when he wrote :

> For the first time, in the Nayanmar and Alvar hymns, a regional language became the medium of a sacred liturgy central to the regional practice of Hinduism. Here, too, Tamil Nad. . . . .now retransmitted a revitalised popular Hinduism to all regions of India at precisely the moment when Hinduism was to need renewed strength for the dark ages of Islamic hegemony.[51]

The bases for both regionalism and All-India unity were laid. The *bhakti* movement is a classical example of how Sanskritisation and regionalisation can occur at the same time and through the same agents.[52]

Another paradox is that, because *bhakti* centred itself around icons, this movement—so egalitarian in inspiration—paved the

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[50] Trans. by A. L. Basham, *Wonder*, ibid.

[51] S. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[52] " Both Kabir of the Hindi region and Caitanya of the Bengal were inspired by southern precedents . . . . Like a lit fuse, the passion of *bhakti* seems to spread from region to region . . . . Arising in particular regions, speaking the local spoken language, it is yet interregional—both parochial and universal." A. K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva, op. cit.*, p. 40.

way for strengthened Brahminic ritualism. A further irony is that Murugan worship, which was an important regional catalyst for the development of *bhakti*, was swallowed up in devotion for Krishna and Siva. Murugan became absorbed into Subramania, son of Siva, who himself had many attributes of the northern Skanda. Murugan, somewhat transformed, was to reemerge, however.

In this period, not only did temples flourish, but *maths* or monasteries, probably drawing their inspiration from Buddhist monasteries, began to be established. Some were Brahminic and some were non-Brahminic but all were Saivite since it was Saivism which exalted the *guru* or *adigalar*. For Vaishnavites, the *bhakti* movement was to culminate in the *Vishistadvaita* or " qualified non-dualism " of the famous Tamil Vaishnavite philosopher, Ramanujan.

Even more important for the Tamils, *bhakti* gave birth to *Saiva Siddhanta*, less well known outside of Tamil Nadu than Ramanujan's system, but more influential within the Tamil area. It drew from early Saivite texts (called *Agamas*) by northern sects such as the *Kapalikas* and *Pasupatas* and supplemented and transformed them by Tamil works based on the *Nayanmar* hymns. Later these Tamil texts virtually replaced the earlier Sanskritic ones in the Tamil country and by the fourteenth century *Saiva Siddhanta* had a well-established and sophisticated theology. It is much more dualistic than even Ramanujan's system and, according to Basham,

> approached nearer to thorough-going monotheism than any other Hindu sect. . . In (Siva's) character as bestower of *karma*, he is pure justice and his justice is but an aspect of his love for his creatures.[53]

Saiva Siddhanta represents, in a codified system, a creative fusion of Sanskritic and Tamil ideas.

While much has been written about the *bhakti* singers, the literature is virtually non-existent about another important group the *siddhars*. To many present-day Tamils they represent something uniquely regional, and yet the term itself comes from Sanskrit

[53] Basham, *Wonder*, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

and the north knew *siddhars* before the south did. *Siddhis* are miraculous powers and in North India according to tradition, there were eighty-four *siddhars*, men and who had gained these powers. The number eighty-four is mythical, as is most of what we know about this group. Mircea Eliade is one of the few scholars who has written even of the northern ones. He feels they arose between " the collapse of Buddhism in eastern India and the dawn of modern times. "[54] He sees the mythology surrounding them as representing

> extremely archaic contents ; they are the emergence of the spiritualities long unknown, and hence unrecorded by the ' official ' cultural circles—that is by circles more or less dependent on a learned tradition whether Brahminic, Buddhist, Jaina, or sectarian.[55]

This group represents a well-formulated, although obscure, folk tradition which is almost an All-India alternate " Great Tradition," although it intersects with the " official " Great Tradition throughout India's history.

To demonstrate just how closely the All-India *siddhar* tradition parallels that of the Tamil *siddhars* one has only to compare Eliade's description with that of one of the few writers who have done research on the Tamil group. Eliade writes :

> Siva is their supreme Lord and salvation consists in union with the divinity through Yoga . . . But they are chiefly known for their magical powers : They have a considerable reputation as healers and magicians . . . [56]

A. V. Subramanya Iyer, the Tamil scholar, admits that there is no authentic historical material about the lives of the Tamil *siddhars*, but defines them as " a certain category of mystic poets who were grim . . . ascetics credited with supernatural powers . . . To almost all the Tamil *siddhars* the Supreme God is Lord Siva."[57] He echoes and confirms Eliade's anti-establishment stress by

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[54] Mircea Eliade, *Yoga : Immortality and Freedom*, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 302.

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 306.

[57] A. V. Subramaniya Iyer, *The Poetry and the Philosohpy of the Tamil Siddhars*, Madras : Manivasakar Noolakam, 1969, p. 1.

writing, "They represent a movement of revolt against certain powerful forces that were shaping the milieu of the people."[58] It was often said by their opponents that they were atheists but their devotion to Siva was total. Throughout the ages in Tamil Nadu they have been popular with the masses. Even today there is a *siddhar* system of medicine, different from the indigenous *Ayurvedic* form.

In popular Tamil Nadu mythology there are eighteen Tamil *siddhars*. Certain themes tie them together. They are iconoclastic, emphasising character and morals and opposing temple worship, casteism, and—often—the Brahmin priesthood. They practice asceticism and are usually distrustful of women, but they retain the sense of sin from the *bhakti* movement. They date mainly from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries. When the passion of *bhakti* occasionally jelled into stereotyped ritualism, they kept the flame of religious passion glowing, although their poetry cannot match that of the Alvars and Nayanmars.

Tirumular is much earlier and many would not accept him as a *siddhar*. He has been coopted by the establishment in a way no other *siddhar* has been. The entire tenth book of the *Tirumurai* (Tamil Saivite Canon) is composed of Tirumular's *Tirumanthiram* I, however, agree with Subramanya Iyer who calls Tirumular a *siddhar* because his philosophy stresses that the experiences of the sacred come through the practice of yoga.[59] His dates are the sixth or seventh century A.D. Often he is believed to have introduced Saivism into the Tamil land. He strongly articulates *anbu*, self-giving love :

> The ignorant think that love (*anbu*) and Siva are two different things ; they do not know that love is Siva.[60]

> Born in love, brought up in love
> Moving and resting in love,
> Fed with the supreme ambrosia of love
> The *Nandi* (vehicle of Siva) entered me as love.[61]

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[58] *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[60] *Love of God*, trans. and ed. M. Dhavamony, London : Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 128.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 132 (parenthesis mine).

An earlier *Sangam* and *Kural* theme is linked to *anbu* in this famous verse :

> Mankind is one and God is one. Remember, remember this well. Why be afraid of death ?[62]

Another very famous *siddhar* who may be somewhat earlier than the tenth century is Sivavakkiar. A typical verse of his, which attacks the Brahminic priesthood, goes as follows :

> Then and now, O priests, you ate no fish,
> Are there not fish in the water where you bathe and drink ?
> Then and now, O priests, you ate no vension,
> Is not the thread on your bosom made of deerskin ?[63]

Another great *siddhar*, Patinattar, attacks idolatry :

> My God is not a chiselled stone . . .
> Nor is he cleansed with tamarind
> Like images of bronze.
> I cannot worship such as these . . .
> But in my heart, I place the feet,
> The golden feet of God.[64]

Iconoclastic, passionate, ascetic, and devoted ; these are the terms to be applied to this group of angry mystics who interwove their own themes into the religious ethos of Tamil Nadu. They may be similar to their northern cousins but their stress on *anbu* and their anti-ritualism garnered support from early Tamil *bhakti* traditions.

The political history of Tamil Nadu during the first thousand years of the Christian era consisted in large part of the interplay between the three old kingdoms, but there were some highly significant intrusions. Two mysterious dynasties arose in Tamil Nadu. Least important were the Kalabharas. They settled primarily around Madurai in the third or fourth centuries A.D. Perhaps they were an indigenous tribal group related to the warlike *Kallars*

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[62] *Santhanam*, trans. Rangachari, *op. cit.*, p. 584.

[63] C. and H. Jesudasan, *A History of Tamil Literature*, Calcutta : Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1961, p. 220.

[64] Charles E. Gover, trans. and ed., *Folk Songs of Southern India*, London : Trubner and Co., 1872, p. 160. J. N. Farquhar believes Patinattar is a *bhakti* poet who has had later *siddhar* verses attribute to him. J. N. Farquhar, *Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, London : Oxford University Press, 1920, p. 352.

but their origins remain shrouded in darkness. What is known is that their rule coincided with a period of cultural decline in the Pandyan country.

A much more significant incursion came from the Pallavas who centred their kingdom in the city of Kancheepuram, west of modern Madras. They apparently arrived on the scene in a rather uncivilized state but they became deeply influenced by the Sanskritic culture to the north and served as a primary means of transmitting that culture to all of Tamil Nadu. They were good warriors and won battles against the Chalukyas in the north and the Pandyas in the south. They were also influenced by the distinctive Tamil culture and near the end of their long period of dominance represented a fusion of cultures. However, the Pallavas are not fully accepted as part of the Tamil tradition. "Even today the Tamil uses the term 'Pallava' where he wants to designate one a rascal or a thief."[65] After more than three hundred years, years which changed the course of Tamil Nadu's development, the Pallavas declined and by 900 A.D. were a negligible force. They left Hinduism victorious over Jainism and Buddhism, an enduring tradition of rock cut and stone temples, a Tamil Nadu whose boundaries were farther north than ever before, and a Tamil culture deeply impregnated with Sanskritic influences.

After this came a glorious period in Tamil history, although for those who look for a more "uniquely Tamil" era, the *Sangam* age is superior. After nearly six centuries the Cholas of Tanjore rose again and surpassed their earlier achievements. From the ninth through the twelfth centuries they created an empire that was not only dominant on the seas but also sent armies as far north as Bengal where "the war elephants of the Chola drank the water of the Ganges".[66] The greatest ruler of the Cholas was Raja Raja. Architecture flourished with the building of magnificent temples such as those at Gangakondacholapuram, Tanjore, and Chidambaram. Massive irrigation projects—which formed the base for later British and independent Indian projects in the area—were established, village government was quickened, and trade

[65] H. G. Rawlinson, *India, A Short Cultural History*, London: Cresset, 1943, p. 194.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

flourished. Unlike the earlier Cholas, however, the later dynasty was permeated by Brahmanic control and Sanskritic culture.

The Chola dynasty had its own epic poet. Kambar's *Ramayana* may be the finest piece of Tamil literature, although it does not influence the present-day Tamil revival as much as do earlier works. One reason is that the *Ramayana* is Vaishnavite rather than Saivite and the other is that Kambar not only drew his theme from Valmiki's *Ramayana* but his language is somewhat over-Sanskritised for today's Tamil taste. It must be remembered however, that if Kambar Sanskritised Tamil, he also " Tamilised " Sanskrit, excluding the harsh sounds so offensive to the Tamil ear. Just prior to this period a courtly language, called *mani-pravala*, had arisen, which was a mixture of Tamil and Sanskrit. Kambar's *Ramayana* is not written in this mixture language. Kambar is believed to have been born in the heart of the Chola country and he had the patronage of a chieftain, Sadayappa. As is usual with Tamil personalities, there is conflict over his dates. The earliest estimate is the ninth century and the latest is the thirteenth. Interior literary evidence seems to point to the late twelfth century as the most logical dating.[67]

The sheer magnitude of his works is overwhelming. In an incredible 42,000 lines (the last book alone is longer than the entire *Illaid*), Kambar retold the story of Rama. Sanskritic thought and literary influences—Kalidasa as well as Valmiki—are present, but the *Sangam* emphasis on nature, the ethical concerns of the *Kural*, and the devotional influence of the *bhakti* poets are all in evidence. One interesting sidelight is that the " villain " Ravana, who is seen as coming from the South, is portrayed much more sympathetically than in Valmiki's version. Rama, larger than life, reminds one of a *Sangam* hero, but he fights for righteousness (*dharma*) rather than for any lesser honour or glory. The love of Rama and Sita has echoes of *akam* poetry.

The Cholas lessened in importance and for a brief period the Pandyas, so central in earlier Tamil history, rose again. By this time the Cheras on the west coast, always isolated, had, under the impact of a strong Sanskritic influence, developed their own culture

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[67] C. and H. Jesudasan, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-4.

and language, a highly Sanskritised vocabulary on a Tamil grammatical base. Marco Polo visited the Pandyan kingdom during this period and his account is fasinating. Even a brief extract will show that the southern kingdoms were still prosperous :

> When you leave the island of Ceylon, you come to the great province of Ma'bar (the Tamil country). It is the best of all the Indies . . . In this kingdom you find very fine and great pearls . . . And I can tell you the king of that state has a very great receipt and treasure . . . Thus, what this king wears between gold and gems and pearls is worth more than a city's ransom . . . [68]

Many of Marco Polo's descriptions of the life of the people hold remarkably true even today but the wealth of which he writes has since gone. In 1298 Muslim raiding parties swept as far south as Rameswaram near Kanyakumari and in 1323 the governor, Jalalu Din Ahsan Shah, decalred himself independent and the Muslims ruled the Pandyan capital until 1378. To all intents and purposes this marked the political end of old Tamil Nadu.

There was a revival of sorts with the rise of the Vijayanagar Empire with its capital in western Andhra. It acted as a powerful buffer between Islam and Tamil Nadu and was a highly cultured kingdom. But it was Telugu, not Tamil, and its role of protector of Hinduism gave it a highly conservative Sanskrit cast. For the Tamils the Vijayanagar protection was a mixed blessing. Finally, after two heroic centuries, Vijayanagar fell at the Battle of Talikota in 1565. But it had done its work. The Muslims equally cultured, had lost their thrust and under a brief revival of the Pandyas and Naiks (Telugu-speaking rulers who continued in local control in the south even after Vijayanagar's fall), the Tamil country had a spurt of creative activity. Temples, including the mammoth Meenakshi temple in Madurai, were extended, as well as massive secular buildings such as Madurai's Naik palace.

At almost the same time as the first Islamic invasion, a literary figure named Peyyamoli had sponsored a Tamil revival in Madurai. Later, in the early fifteenth century a popular poet was also

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[68] Quoted in Husani, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-8.

associated with such a revival. Arunagirinather was, by the traditional account, born in Tiruvannamalai of a *devadasi* (temple dancer) mother. The family god was Murugan and, after an early life spent in sensual pursuits, it is said that Arunagirinather turned to Murugan. He wrote several poetic compositions, some in Sanskrit and many in a heavily Sanskritised Tamil. His masterpiece was a long *bhakti* poem called the *Tiruppughal.* In this beautiful work, Murugan is no longer the mountain god who possessed young women ; he is not even the centre or very early *bhakti.* Rather he is the focus of *Saiva Siddhanta* and of temple worship.[69] Murugan was reemerging in the Tamil country as a popular deity associated with literary-religious creativity.

The sixteenth century marked the beginning of the modern Western impact on South India.[70] Like the ancient Romans and Greeks, the Portuguese, Danes, Dutch, French, and British came to Tamil Nadu's fabled Coromandel Coast to trade. Meanwhile Marathas from western India were establishing themselves in the old Chola centres of Tamil Nadu. From this point, Tamil Nadu's history became a chess game of conflicting powers with the Tamils usually being the pawns. It was in Madras that the clerk, Robert Clive, first rose to eminence and where he and the equally brilliant French strategist, Dupleix, matched wits in a contest that their governments seldom seemed to realise involved huge stakes.

To gain a sense of the confusion of the period it is only necessary to look at the year 1724. In that year the Sultan of Hyderabad, profiting from the Emperor Aurangzeb's death had declared himself the ruler of all South India. The British were in control of Madras and the French were centred in Pondicherry. The Dutch had succeeded the Danes in Tranquebar and in Nagapattinam. Eighteen years before, in 1706, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg had landed at Tranquebar, becoming the first Protestant missionary in Tamil Nadu. Roman Catholics had been present since the sixteenth century. Their most daring innovator was the Jesuit, Roberto de Nobili. In Tanjore, the Maratha Serofji was ruling, and on the west coast the Portuguese were ensconced. There is no need to follow the confused tangle. By 1801, at the

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[69] *The Indian Express*, 26 November 1970.

[70] It was in 1579 that the first book in Tamil characters was printed—rolling off a Roman Catholic press in the west coast town of Cochin !

end of the Third Mysore War, most of the Tamil country had passed to the control of the British East India Company "in perpetuity".

Even in the turbulent eighteenth century, however, Tamil Nadu could produce great religio-literary figures. Tayumanavar (1706-44) was a true inheritor of the *siddhar* tradition, singing such lines as "My heart is the temple, my thoughts the incense, my love the holy water."[71] As had been true of Arunagirinather, he wrote in Sanskrit as well as in Tamil.

In briefly sketching these two thousand years of history, the theme that seems most prominent is that of a usually creative mixture between Northern and Southern Influences. There was the folk religion of the Little Tradition—godlings, spirits, animal sacrifice, and so on. There were also the highly Sanskritised practices of the most elite Brahmins. Between them, however, existed a broad stratum of what can be termed Tamil regional Hinduism. Both the Brahminic elite and the outcaste villager participated in it—and contributed to it—but it can be differentiated from each and it was the broadest religious stream in Tamil Nadu.

Clifford Geertz, in his *Islam Observed*, depicts the classical styles of Morocco and Indonesia through two legendary personalities. Geertz does this because these figures have become metaphors or symbols. Whatever they originally were has long since been dissolved into images. In short, they serve as "human recapitulations of a social transformation". In meditating about Tamil Nadu's classical ethos and its relation to All-India Hinduism on the one hand and village religion on the other, I have selected four such human metaphors and a legend about each—legends in which they have become dissolved and paradoxically, crystallised.

First is Tirumular who embodies both *bhakti* and *siddhar* elements. Today he is thought to be the founder of Saivism in Tamil Nadu. The first written record of his legend appears in the *Periya Puranam*, a traditional telling of the lives of sixty-three

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[71] Trans. by C. and H. Jesudasan, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

Saivite devotees. It is attributed to Sekkilar, also known as Ramadevar, a middle-caste Vellala of the twelfth century.[72]

Drawing on the already well-established legend, Sekkilar depicts Tirumular as a Brahmin and a *yogin* well versed in the *siddhis* who lived in what is now Kashmir. He made a pilgrimage to Tamil Nadu, visiting on his way Siva temples in Nepal and Banaras. One day, in Tamil Nadu, he passed a herd of cows who were bewailing the death of their young and handsome herdsman, Mulan. Tirumular was moved by compassion for the saddened cows and so he entered the body of Mulan. The common people of the area came to respect his *yogic* powers and accepted him as a charismatic virtuoso. When, however, he attempted to find his own body, he could not locate it. Tirumular realized that Siva had hidden it because he wanted him to express the great *Agamic* truths (the Northern sectarian Saivite works) in Tamil. And so he composed the famed *Tirumanthiram*.

Kashmir and Nepal were other "marginal" areas brought, at least in part, into All-India Hindu civilization through Saivism. Linking them and Tamil Nadu to orthodox Banaras obviously undergirds a concept of Sanskritic, pan-Indian unity. Sanskritisation is also underlined in the legend by the emphasis on Tirumular's task of translating Northern truths into Tamil. Siva, however, wanted these truths to be in Tamil, which helped legitimise Tamil regional Hinduism. The young and handsome cowherd had echoes of the rival Krishna, whose Vaishnavite influence was beginning to be felt in Tamil Nadu, but perhaps he also represents an oblique reference to Murugan.

By making it clear, however, that Tirumular took the form of a low caste Tamil cowherd and wrote the *Tirumanthiram* in his body, the Tamil regional emphasis of the *Tirumanthiram* and of Southern Saivism is preserved and emphasized. After all Tirumular never did find his original northern Brahmin body again! One feels a persistent resistance to the caste (*varna*) system. The legend represents a continuing tension between North and South, Brahmin and non-Brahmin, but the tension is creatively articulated in the

[72] Yogi Suddhananda Bharati, trans., *The Grand Epic of Saivism*, Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1970. A version of the story of Tirumular appears on pp. 155-8.

Tirumanthiram—a major root of Tamil regional Hinduism (Tamilisation) *and* of Sanskritisation.

If the story of Tirumular symbolises a creative tension, the equally famous legend of Kannappan emphasises the Tamil side of this conflict. It is a story which has many later parallels and which also appears in the *Periya Puranam*. A fearless mountain chieftain and his equally courageous wife prayed to Murugan for a child. They were blessed with a son—Thinnan, the strong-willed. Thinnan grew into a strong young man. One day, he and his friends went hunting and caught a wild boar. After cooking it, Thinnan wandered further into the forest and discovered an image of Siva. The image was decorated with flowers, placed there by a Brahmin priest who looked after it. Thinnan returned to his fire, got some roasted pork, carried some river water in his mouth, and—brushing the flowers aside—gave the god the pork and bathed him with the water.

Later the priest returned, saw the bones and the scattered flowers, and mourned the sacrilege. For several days this scenario was repeated but finally Siva persuaded the Brahmin to hide nearby. Thinnan came and, as usual, gave Siva the pork and washed the image with the water carried in his mouth. Suddenly Siva's right eye began to bleed and Thinnan tried to staunch it with herbs. The bleeding, however, continued and Thinnan tore out his own right eye and put it on the eye of the image. The bleeding stopped and Thinnan ecstatically danced the old Murugan dance. Then the image's other eye began to bleed and Thinnan, with his spear, began to cut out his left eye, crying that even if blind, he would see the god with the eye of his heart. Siva, however, called out to him and stopped him, saying that such loving devotion should be an example. The Brahmin priest emerged rather sheepishly from where he had been hiding. Siva gave Thinnan the new name of Kannappan—he who plucked out his eye—and recited,

> All his form is love of us,
> All his wisdom is knowledge of us,
> Therefore, all his deeds are sweet to us.[73]

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[73] C. and H. Jesudasan, trans., *op. cit.*, p. 154.

In this legend, Murugan is replaced by Siva, a clear example of Sanskritisation. But the offering of meat, despised by the Brahminic gods, is acceptable if it is accompanied by *anbu*—love. The ancient dance to Murugan is also accepted, as is the water carried in a low caste hunter's mouth. Implied is a criticism of Brahminic ritual if it is only done by rote. *Arul* or grace is a result of true *bhakti*. Thinnan, the strong willed, becomes Kannappan, he who offers his will to Siva. There are many echoes in the story of the disciplined *bhakti* that had begun to become part of the Sanskritic Great Tradition but, through the dramatic portrayal of the pork—most unclean of meats—and of water carried in the mouth of an impure hunter, the message of loving devotion cuts more deeply than in most Sanskritic literature. The worship of the Little Tradition of the mountain Murugan is not rejected and destroyed, it is absorbed and legitimised. And in the absorption something is added to the Siva tradition. Sanskritisation is present in the story but the distinctive ethos of emerging Tamil regional Hinduism dominates the legend.

The Kannappan myth provides the Tamil facet of the spectrum ; a look at the Brahmin Kambar, author of the *Ramayana*, focuses on a more Sanskritic aspect of Tamil Hinduism, but again demonstrates the emergence of regional Hinduism. In the Chola court, says a legend about Kambar, there was a famous bard known as Ottakootar. It is generally agreed by today's critics that he was a good but not outstanding poet whose highly Sanskritised language fell just short of *mani-pravala*.[74] In the legend the king asked each poet to prepare a verse version of the *Ramayana*. Some time later he called both men before him and asked them how they were doing. Ottakootar knew Kambar hadn't even begun and so he asked him to recite a verse from his work. Spontaneously, Kambar produced a verse in which he used the word *thumi* or droplet. Ottakootar was angry at this display of genius and he challenged Kambar on the use of the word *thumi*, saying *thuli* was the proper term. Kambar replied that he would prove he was correct and he took Ottakooter and the king into the city. They saw a girl churning curd in front of her lower-class home. She shouted at some children playing around her to go further away " unless some curd droplets (*thumis*) should fall on you."

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

Thus, even for the Brahmin and relatively-Sanskritised Kambar, it was popular usage that legitimised his language, not the conventions of the court. A stubborn emphasis on popular Tamil is preserved and demonstrated by the legend.[75]

Perhaps the best "human metaphors" representing social transformation in Tamil Nadu are Pattirahiriyar and Kapilar, and their interactions. Pattirahiriyar probably lived between the tenth and twelfth centuries. He is considered a *siddhar*, but also has much in common with the so-called "People's Poets" or "Beggar Poets."[76] His *Lamentations* (*Pulambal*) are well known to the common people of Tamil Nadu. Two verses are as follows:

> When may my thoughts be fixed alone on Him
> Who is Himself all sweetness, made all things,
> Whom all the *Vedas* sought, though seeing dim,
> Who saveth him that to His mercy clings?
>
> When shall we be one great brotherhood
> Unbroken by the tyranny of caste
> Which Kapila in early days withstood
> And taught that men were one in times now passed?[77]

In the first verse one discovers a provisional acceptance of the Sanskritic *Vedas*, although they saw only dimly. There is, however, a cry to Siva who will offer his compassionate grace (*arul*) to those who cling to him in love (*anbu*). The second verse is even more important. *Anbu* is extended to the social structure in the ideal of a casteless "brotherhood". A future hope is expressed in terms of what is claimed to be a past reality. A casteless society is longed for not as a good for which one strives, but as a return to an original condition. Change is desired but it is change legitimated by an archaic model.

The figure Pattirahiriyar turns to is Kapila—already a quasi-mythical figure in Pattirahiriyar's day. Probably the Kapila Pattirahiriyar is thinking of is the author of the *Kapila Ahaval*, a document of which the following lines are representative:

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[75] S. Maharajan, "Kamban," New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1972, has an account of this legend.
[76] C. and H. Jesudasan, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
[77] Charles H. Gover, trans., *op. cit.*, p. 159.

Oh Brahmins, list to me
In all this blessed land
There is but one great caste
One tribe and brotherhood,
One God doth dwell above,
And he hath made us one
In birth and frame and tongue.

If, therefore, Oh ye fools,
You would observe and do
The precepts of your ancestors,
Give alms to all who need,
And, as for this life, avoid
All that is mean . . .[78]

The *Kapila Ahaval* is probably no older then ninth century but even for the only slightly later Pattirahiriyar, it has great legitimacy because it bears Kapila's name. Kapila is a time-honoured figure in the Tamil country. In early *Sangam* days there had been a legendary Kapila, traditionally responsible for 206 poems. He was supposed to be a great friend of his patron, the chieftain, Pari, and their relationship has been the ideal model for the bard-patron bond.

From this small example one can see that the Tamil tradition, as with all traditions, was always in flux. There was always protest against Brahminic supremacy and the *varna* system and this protest justified itself by appealing to an earlier age—whether in the case of Pattirahiriyar or the author of the *Kapila Ahaval*. Thus, by the tenth or twelfth centuries the *Sangam* Age was already seen as a touchstone, the ideal age to which the society should return.

One sees here a clear illustration of that " traditionalisation of change " which Singer and Srinivas so correctly perceive as a key process of Indian history. From this example, it is also clear that while Sanskritisation was continually occurring in Tamil Nadu, Tamilisation—the manipulation of regional symbols conjuring up a distinctive ethos—was also asserting itself and discovering its own archaic exemplars.

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[78] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

To close this meditation on the classical ethos of Tamil Nadu, I will emerge from the mists of legend into the often equally arcane atmosphere of contemporary philological-historical research. Writing of languages in India, the respected Bengali linguist, S. K. Chatterji notes,

> a general evolution or mutual imposition . . . of some common characteristics which may be called specifically *Indian* and which are found in most languages belonging to all those families (e.g.) the cerebral or retroflex sounds . . .[79]

A. L. Basham is even more specific :

> A fixture of the Indo-Aryan languages . . . is the presence in them of a series of consonantals generally known as "retroflex" or "cerebral" . . . The distinction between the two groups of consonants occurs in the earliest Sanskrit literature we know, the *Rig Veda*, and it is at the same time a characteristic feature of the Dravidian languages . . . Philologists have shown that many common words in Sanskrit have been borrowed from Dravidian sources.[80]

It has already been established that in the earliest extant stratum of Tamil literature some Sanskrit words and Sanskritic influences are present. But if the Dravidian languages are indebted to Sanskrit, it is equally true that Sanskrit itself was influenced by the Dravidian languages. It is this "mutual imposition" of cultures that comprise Indian civilization. Tamil culture has its own mode and that style is one of the most distinctive in India. Clearly it is more than a Little Tradition but it is not really an alternate Great Tradition. It is a regional tradition or "spread".

Tamil Hinduism draws both from its own Little Tradition and from All-India Hinduism. Throughout the past two thousand years of continual change, Tamil Nadu has participated in, gained from, and contributed to Indian civilization. In the process it has developed its own regional Hinduism. This is the message I find in the legends surrounding exemplary Tamil culture heroes as well as from more conventional historical evidence.

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[79] S. K. Chatterji, *Dravidian*, Annamalainagar : Annamalai University Press, 1965, p. 12.
[80] A. L. Basham, *Reflections*, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-8.

CHAPTER III

THE GROWTH OF MODERNISATION

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are obviously of great importance in the rise of modernisation in Tamil Nadu. This study, however, is primarily concerned with the period of the greatest flowering of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam—1949 to 1972. Utilising the conceptual framework already outlined, I shall view the earlier period by concentrating on the development of regional and pan-India identities in Tamil Nadu. Primordial sentiments will provide the primary tool for my analysis. Exemplary figures of the period will be used as metaphors of change.

The figure of the mid-nineteenth century who most represents 'the human recapitulation of a social transformation' is Ramalingaswamy. His integration of *bhakti* and *siddhar* themes might seem unusual but these two Saivite types had been combined before. One of his many biographers views him as a reincarnation of Tayumanavar.[1] I choose him as a key metaphor for this period not only because of the content of his thought but because he has been seized by tamil 'modernisers' of several persuasions as they attempt to anchor their proposed changes to the rock of continuity. Much of the Tamil Renaissance could be studied by viewing the interpretations given to Ramalingaswamy by contemporary Tamil modernisers.

Virtually all later writers agree on one of Ramalingaswamy's final speeches to his followers. Given in January, 1874, it went roughly like this :

> You are not fit to become members of this Society of Universal Brotherhood. The real members of that Brotherhood are living far away, towards the north of India . . . The time is not far off when persons from Russia and America and other foreign lands will come to India and preach to you the same

[1] Uran Adigal, *Ramalinga Adigalvaralaru*, Vadalore : Samarasa Sanmarga Araia Nilayam, n.d.

> doctrine of Universal Brotherhood. Then only will you know and appreciate the grand truths that I am vainly trying to make you accept. You will soon find that the brothers who live in the far north will work a great many wonders in India and thus bring incalculable benefits on our country.[2]

Mention of 'our country' should be seen in the light of later nationalistic development when Gandhi was viewed as having been foretold by the Swamy. The ally of Gandhi in Madras, the Theosophical Society of Annie Besant, tied itself to Ramalinga. Madam Blavatsky, founder of the society, wrote in *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy* that Ramalingaswamy's

> Prophecy about the universal brotherhood in India to be established by the wise from Russia and America and the far North India is quite correct. In 1873, I got a command to go from Russia to Paris ; in June of the same year, . . I went to New York. It was during this time that the Mahatma (Ramalinga) was telling what would happen in the future. In 1874 I met Colonel Alcott. In 1875 the Theosophical Society was started and in 1879 it was transferred to Adyar (Madras).[3]

A recent brief but excellent study of Ramalingaswamy by T. Dayanandan Francis, a leading Christian scholar of Tamil literature, states that 'No one has ever preached so vehemently against the evils of casteism and religious bigotry as Ramalinga, excepting perhaps Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy, the leader of the Dravida Kazhagam.'[4] It will be demonstrated that no greater gap exists in Tamil Nadu than that between E.V. Ramaswamy and the Theosophical Society. Both, however, link themselves, or are linked, to Ramalingaswamy. Tamil Communists also often refer to the Swamy as a powerful influence on their lives. In addition, he is the patron saint of the South India Saiva Siddhanta Society, a Non-Brahmin group which promotes the tenets of *Saiva Siddhanta*.

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[2] P. Mutharasu, *The Life of Saint Ramalingar*, Tirunelveli : Samarasa Sanmarga Sangham, 1969, pp. 106-7. For other but similar versions *cf.* T. Dayanandan Francis, *Ramalinga Swamy*, Madras : Christian Literature Society for CISRS, 1972, p. 20 and Kaviyogi Suddhananda Bharathiyar, *Saint Ramalingam*, Madras : Arulperunjothi Press, 1936, p. 41.

[3] Quoted in Suddhananda Bharathiar, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-2 (parenthesis mine).

[4] T. Dayanandan Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 3

Ramalingaswamy was born to Saivite Vellala parents on October 5, 1823, near the famous Saivite temple town of Chidambaram. While he was still very young his father died and the family moved to a town near Madras. A story is told that when he was only nine years old he hung a mirror on one of the walls of the room and decorated it with flowers. Lighting a lamp before it, he meditated on the deity Murugan. One day he saw the form of Murugan in the mirror. From this event, Ramalinga gave up images and later, in his centre at Vadalur, he used a lamp and mirror to symbolise the Ultimate.

While still young, he walked daily to the temple at Tiruvottiyur, five miles north of Madras. Tiruottiyur was known as a place where the Saivite *Nayanmars*, Sambandar, Appar, and Sundaramurthi, had visited and praised Siva. Sundaramurthi, a Brahmin, had—according to legend—married a Vellala girl in that temple. The Lord Siva himself commanded that the nuptials take place! The famous *siddhar*, Pattinatar, supposedly also gained salvation there. These traditions, Siva-Murugan *bhakti* and the meditative powers of the *siddhars*, seem to have been paramount influences on Ramalingaswamy's life.

Later, he moved to Vadalur, not far from Chidambaram, and founded the *Samarasa Sudha Sanmarga Satya Sangam* in 1865 (roughly, 'the Society of Elevated Souls Following a Prescribed Path'). Throughout his life, he produced more than seven thousand devotional poems divided into six *Tirumurais* or books by his devoted disciple, Velayutha Mudaliar. They were written in a heavily Sanskritised Tamil but were filled with deep spirituality. A flavour of his teaching comes from one poem :

> In castes, in philosophical dogma, in the conflicting ceremonials of sectarian practices, in the noisy debates on *Sastras* in the wars of *Gotras*.
>
> Pinning your faith on these differences, distinctions, and quarrels from times immemorial, you men and women are restless and tossed about . . .
>
> To establish you in eternal Justice, in the very heart of the reality of blissful existence.
>
> The One without an equal, the Lord who takes his endearing abode in the inner sanctuary of all lives.

> Is now coming into the open and into the broad daylight of our experience and will play his unique game of Glory and Grace.[5]

One sees the ancient Tamil themes of glory (*pukal*) and grace (*arul*) but this is combined with an emerging concept of evolution. Ramalinga also stressed that 'to a starving and suffering man, God comes in the form of food and service' and so he founded the *Dharma Salai* where any needy person could be given food.[6] In 1872, he had his octagonal 'temple,' the *Gnana Sabhai*, constructed and dedicated to Nataraja the dancing Siva of Chidambaram. One is told that the lamp burning in the shrine is the one lit by him.

After lighting the flame, he went to a nearby village and in January, 1874, he gave a final sermon, went into his hut and shut the door, claiming he had attained *samadhi*. A year after he vanished into the hut, the door was opened but there was no evidence of the Swamy. One finds in this legend echoes not only of the *siddhars* but also of such figures as Nanak and Kabir. Virtually all writers about Ramalingaswamy compare him to Sri Ramakrishna. They cite one great difference, however; Ramakrishna had his Vivekananda but Ramalinga had none. In recent years, as has been pointed out, Ramalinga's 'Vivekanandas' are still appearing and interpreting his message in various ways.

Ramalinga stands as proof of religious vitality in nineteenth century Tamil Nadu. The British Collector of South Arcot District did come to the village of Mettukuppam after Ramalinga shut himself into his hut and an abstract of his report appeared in 1878 and later was published in the 1906 *South Arcot Gazetteer*. It ended with these words:

> Whatever may be thought of his claims to be a religious teacher, it is generally admitted . . . that his poems . . . stand on a high plane and his story is worth noting as an indication of the directions which religious fervour may still take.[7]

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[5] Ramalingaswamy, *Thiru Arutpa*, trans. A. Balakrishnan, Madras: Nachimuthu Industrial Association, 1966, p. 285.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. iv.

[7] Quoted in Mutharasu, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-8 and Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

There had been no stagnation in the religious life of Tamil Nadu. *Adigalars* or *acharyas* were still very present as were the traditions of the *bhaktas* and the *siddhars*.

Charles E. Gover, a civil servant in South India during this period, is another foreign witness to this continuing vitality. In 1872, his book *The Folk Songs of Southern India*[8] appeared. He attacked those who study the Hinduism of the South by only looking at Brahmin priests and temple worship :

> It has not been noticed how great is the gulf between even the low class Brahmins and the higher members of the Sudra class . . . It will be said that such a state of things could not continue ; that the Reformation was the natural result of the time of Erasmus ; and that such a movement must have happened in India . . . and just such as revolution . . . has taken place . . . Religious Hinduism in Southern India is now a thing of sects, each with its own guru. Every Hindu below the Brahmin caste chooses his sect . . . He promises unhesitating obedience to the guru who is seldom a Brahmin . . . Occasionally the guru travels in great state through the districts . . . Everywhere he collects his dues, receives offerings and gifts, teaches the peculiar doctrines of the sect . . . Their general tendency is to import the results of the philosophical systems of the higher Brahmins and present a scheme . . . in which idolatry is unknown and the divinity is always spoken of as the great soul of the universe . . . This silent revolution has been, as far as can now be seen, altogether independent of European influence and agency . . . It had begun long before the rise of British power.[9]

This quotation, while overstated and too eager to find Reformation parallels emphasises that one cannot judge nineteenth century Southern Hinduism by relying only a Brahminic sources. Yet in its descriptions of sectarian non-Brahmin Hinduism, it demonstrates that this regional Hinduism served as a Sanskritising as well as a Tamilising force. It portrays a popular Hinduism which is neither 'Little Traditional' nor stagnant. Finally, it serves

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[8] Charles E. Gover, *op. cit.*
[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

as a healthy corrective to those who attribute all changes in nineteenth century Hinduism to the impact of British rule or Western influence.

Although South India was religiously alive and active, it was politically somewhat static. Gover bemoans the fact that local religious feeling in Bengal was much better known than that in South India. Politically, Bengal was a seething cauldron compared to Tamil Nadu. The reasons for this are difficult to discover, especially since British presence had been in the South as long as in Bengal. Some explanations are obvious. Christian missionaries in Bengal started journals which brought counter efforts by both high caste Christian converts and by apologists for Hinduism. In the South, many converts were middle and lower caste and Christianity did not seem a threat to the Brahmins who as Gover pointed out, were more separated from the masses than they were in Bengal. Also Calcutta, as the capital of British India, was a great centre of political activity.

A rare 1904 Indian quotation underlines the political inactivity of late nineteenth century Tamil Nadu and ties it to religious developments. South Indians

> firmly believed that the Almighty. . .sent his angels in the form of the British. . .to save the great religions and customs of the Hindus who were crushed under the Juggernaut of Muslim rule and that only under the British would their customs grow and flourish as a child would on mother's milk. . .[10]

Reminiscing about Madras in 1878, the Bengali nationalist politician, Surendranath Banerjee, said it was 'the only place in all India where (it was) impossible to hold a public meeting upon a question of vital interest to our people and in regard to which there was practical unanimity all over India.'[11] All this was to change. In 1927 Banerjee could write that Madras was 'so instinct with the public life of India.'[12]

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[10] Kurumalai Sundaram Pillai, quoted in V. Subramaniam 'Tamil Political Journalism—The Pre-Gandhian Period,' *Tamil Culture* vol. X, No. 4, Madras The Academy of Tamil Culture, Oct.-Dec. 1963, p. 28.

[11] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 21.

[12] *Ibid.*

The growth of Tamil self-consciousness was fuelled by the three "primordial identities" of language, ethnic origin and religion (Bellah) or 'primordial sentiments' of blood, speech and custom (Geertz). In outlining this growth one must begin with language. For the Tamils, language has had the greatest catalytic power. Geertz seems somewhat puzzled by the primordial power of language in India. He writes that "linguism—for some yet to be adequately explained reason—is particularly intense in the Indian subcontinent."[13] His fellow anthropologist, Bernard Cohn, more familiar with India, pinpoints the importance of language. He has written that regional symbols

> may be couched in linguistic terms. . . When, however, one gets behind the identification with the language *per se* and looks at the content of the particular set of symbols that make up the regional identification, it is apparent that it is literature, religion, and political history that are being called upon.[14]

The past one hundred years have brought a remarkable renaissance of the Tamil language and its literature. This was accompanied by a surge of hitorical consciousness. The most convenient date for the beginning of this renaissance is 1856. In that year the Anglican Bishop of Tirunelveli, Robert Caldwell (1819-1891), published his monumental, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages.*[15] For the first time the four southern Indian languages were viewed as a related group and the term "Dravidian" was used to describe a family of languages and the people who spoke them.

From this time on, the surge of literary activity moved swiftly forward. Other missionaries, such as G.U. Pope (1820-1907) played a distinguished role. But the greatest figures were South Indian writers who delved into Tamil history and culture. The Brahmin, Swaminatha Ayer (1855-1942), rediscovered and edited the influential *Sangam* tests. The first modern edition of *Kalittokai* appeared in 1887 and the total work was completed with

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[13] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures, op. cit.*, p. 272.
[14] Bernard Cohn, 'Regions Subjective and Objective,' *op. cit.*, p. 22.
[15] Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* (2nd ed.) London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1875.

the publication of *Akananuru* in 1920. V. Kanakasabhai Pillai (1855-1906), revised and expanded, in 1904, a series of articles on Tamil history that he had written for the *Tamil Review* into a still valid study, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago.*[16]

Much speculation accompanied this scholarship. P. Sundaram Pillai (1855-1897) is typical of the direction much of this speculation took. He examined the datings of early and virtually forgotten Tamil works and declared that the history of India should be written from the banks of the Cauvery, not the Ganges. He also interpreted the Hindu epic, *The Ramayana*, as the record of a war between the Aryans and Dravidians and he hailed Ravana, enemy of the "Aryan" hero Rama, as a Dravidian champion. He extolled *Saiva Siddhanta* as a Dravidian philosophy. J. M. Nallaswami Pillai (1864-1920) is another early figure of special importance. In 1886, a *Saiva Siddhanta Sabha* was founded to promote *Saiva Siddhanta* as a distinctive Dravidian religion. In 1897, Nallaswami Pillai began an English journal called *The Light of Truth*. He published and lectured extensively but in 1918 confessed to a Justice Party conference that '*Saiva Siddhanta* did not have the same force in mobilizing non-Brahmin opinion as the Justice Party did.'[17] He was to be proved wrong in this pessimistic prediction.

Creative writing in Tamil also began to flourish. The first Tamil novel, *Prathapa Mudaliar Charrittaram*, was written by a Christian convert, Samuel Vedanayagam Pillai (1826-1889). In the Preface the author describes why he wrote it— "to supply the want of prose works in Tamil. . . .and also to give a practical illustration of the maxims of morality. . ."[18] The combinations of Tamil patriotism and moralism were to remain dominant themes in Tamil literature. Vedanayagam Pillai was soon followed by-two Brahmin authors, Rajam Ayer (1872-1898) and M. Mandaviah (1874-1926). It would be impractical to catalogue the many

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[16] V. Kanakasabhai Pillai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, (2nd ed.), Tirunelveli : The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1956.

[17] *The Madras Mail*, 30 October 1918. Quoted in Irschick, *op. cit*, p. 293. Irschick seems to accept this evaluation and this is one major difference between us. I shall attempt to demonstrate that a popularized form of *Saiva Siddhanta* is a major ingredient of the present-day Tamil world view.

[18] R. E. Asher, 'The Tamil Renaissance and the Beginning of the Tamil Novel,' *The Novel in India*, T. W. Clark, ed. London : Allen and Unwin, 1970, p. 184.

creative writers who followed, but two more Brahmins deserve special mention : R. Krishnamurthi (1899-1954), better known as Kalki, and Pudumaipittan (1906-1948). The first wrote long historical novels influenced by the romanticism of Sir Walter Scott and the second was an angry but talented polemicist who wrote iconoclastic short stories. Kalki was the editor of two still very prominent magazines, *Ananda Vikatan* and *Kalki*.

Journals and newspapers provided space for this burst of creative activity and, after a slow start, journalism flowered in the Tamil country. G. Subramania Iyer was the pioneer, founding, in 1880 the English language *Hindu* and, in 1882, the Tamil *Swadesamitran*. Both were strongly political and became increasingly identified with the growing All-India nationalist movement. Subramanya Siva's *Gnana Bharu*, founded in 1911, was both political and Hindu revivalist. *Purnachandrodayam* fostered the ideas of the Theosophical Society and coupled them with an elitist and tolerant Hindu 'spirituality.' Perhaps more important, in the light of later history, were the caste journals such as *Bhuloka Vyasam* for the outcastes and *Viswakarman* for the *asari* or carpenter caste.

Increasingly, as pan-Indian nationalism grew and as the Tamil renaissance blossomed, the two types of identity mentioned by Geertz began to intermingle and conflict. On the one hand was that which came from the 'primordial givens' and on the other was the desire to be part of a modern state. The greatest Tamil writer of the twentieth century portrays the interaction and tension between this growing regional and national loyalty. He was Subramania Bharati (1882-1921). There were several strings to his bow. First, he was a fine journalist, founding the nationalistic newspaper, *India*, and then being forced to flee for political reasons, to French-controlled Pondicherry. His use of cartoons and his castigation of foreign rulers and moderate Indians alike, marks him as a journalistic pioneer. But it is as a poet that Bharati is most remembered. In addition to his pan-Indian nationalism, there were three main thrusts to his work, thrusts which embody the literary revival.

Above all, he was a social reformer, attacking caste although he was Brahmin and opposing the subjugation of women. He was also a major stimulus to creative writing, especially poetry. His third

thrust is less commented upon. Like many who spawned the Tamil rebirth, his influence was double-edged. While he built an All-India consciousness, he also inspired a strong regional loyalty. He would write

> Of one race and class are we—
> Indian all.
> In measure and value—
> Everyone the same !
> All are the sovereign rulers
> of this land . . . [19]

He could also say

> Tamil Nad, thy name is honey to my ears, of languages, I know there's none sweeter than Tamil.[20]

In Chapter Two it was demonstrated that, in a less conscious way, this interaction between regional identity and pan-India identity had been present throughout Tamil history. At the time of Bharati's writing the conflict, and consciousness of it, became more acute, evidence of how primordial sentiments are often stimulated by modernisation. Many writers followed the lead of Bharat in trying to reconcile regional and All-Indian traditions. Namakkal Ramalingam (1888-1969) made Gandhi into a reincarnation of Tiruvalluvar, author of the *Tirukkural*. Desigavinayagam Pillai (1876-1954) and R. P. Sethu Pillai (1896-1961) also fall in this tradition.

After Bharati, the most prominent representative of this combination of regional and national identities was Tiru V. Kaliyanasundara Mudaliyar (1883-1953). Throughout Tamil Nadu he was known as Tiru Vee Kaa. He was a leading journalist propagating ideas of the freedom movement and also modernising the Tamil language. He went so far as to say that perhaps both Tamil and Sanskrit were derived from the same source.[21] His

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[19] Subramania Bharati, *Bharata Samudhayam*, trans. R. Rangachari, ed. K. Santhanam, *An Anthology of Indian Literature*, *op. cit.*, p. 602.

[20] Subramania Bharati, *Sen-Tamil-Nadu*, trans. X. Thani Nayagam, 'Regional Nationalism in Twentieth Century Tamil Literature,' *Tamil Culture*, Madras : Oct.-Dec. 1963, p. 11. For a Marxist interpretation of Bharati, and some excellent translations of his poetry, see David Luddin, 'The Songs and Revolution of Bharati,' *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, ed. Gough and Sharma, New York : Monthly Review Press, 1973, pp. 267-90.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 8

opposition to caste was stronger than that of Gandhi. He advocated 'mixed marriages' appealing to the same tradition of the marriage of the Nayanmar, Sundaramurthi, that had so affected Ramalingaswamy :

> Mixed marriage fortifies nature. It's also a thing agreeable to the Lord. It is worth pointing out here that when Sundaramurthi Nayanmar, a Saiva Brahmin was about to enter a caste marriage, the Lord interrupted it and made him contract a mixed marriage.[22]

This was one of the influences on what later came to be known as 'Self-Respect Marriages.'

Tiru Vee Kaa was a follower of *Saiva Siddhanta* and did much to reinvigorate the cult of Murugan, but he often commented on the affinities between Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, and the Saivite system. Also he was one of the first to link Ramakrishna and Ramalingaswamy :

> Great saints like Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Ramalinga Adigal appear on this earth to preach to the people the oneness of godhood and tolerance to faiths other than their own.[23]

But he could also write :

> Dear students of Tamil. Turn your attention to your country . . . It is in utter disorder . . . What is the chief cause ? The answer is neglect of the Mother Tongue and our failure to love and nurture it . . . Of all the languages in the world it is our 'Tamil Mother' that occupies the most degraded position . . . Our Mother, the most ancient and the most glorious of the languages of the world has now fallen from the high pedestal she once occupied.[24]

Kaliyanasundara was able to combined his dual loyalties but there was an increasing number of Tamils who could or would not do so. Maraimalai Adigal (1876-1950) a contemporary of Kaliyanasundara, represents this other side of the coin. He cared little for Indian independence and was virulently opposed to

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[22] 'India and Freedom,' trans. Rangachari, Santhanam, *op. cit.*, p. 611.

[23] Quoted in T. S. Raghavan, *Makers of Modern Tamil*, Madras : South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1965, p. 124.

[24] V. Kaliyanasundara Mudaliyar, trans. Illantheral, *ibid.*, pp. 125-6.

Sanskrit and Hindi. In his zeal he even Tamilised his old name, Swami Vedachalam. As an example of his thoughts on language, there is his Tamil pamphlet, *Hindi Pothu Moliya* (*How Can Hindi Be Our Language*?): "The people who inhabited the whole of India were once only Tamils. This truth has been firmly established by Dr. Caldwell."[25] Caldwell's ghost was stirring.

Maraimalai Adigal was a firm Saivite, but the impact of rationalism and positivism was seen in his interpretation of his faith:

> Now the two primary feelings which lead people to shape their lives and fulfill the purposes of creation are love and hate. Life begins in love but hate comes in its wake to kill it; yet another element of supreme value makes its appearance between the two and helps to perpetuate love and life by up-rooting hate. The principle performing this function is called reason... The ancient Tamils alone made a penetrating study of this vital matter... They had a clear comprehension of the great fact that by loving one another human beings were brought together so as to have interchange of thought.[26]

For proof of this he quotes the famous *Puram* 192 passage, "Every country is my country, every man is my kinsman," passages from the *Tirukkural*, and the Nayanmar, Manickavasakar.[27]

Subramania Bharati and Kaliyanasundara, with their emphasis on both regional and All-Indian loyalties are an important stream in the Tamil revival, but the exclusive concern with the region has been at least an equally deep stream. Both streams were pro-Tamil language and, to some degree, anti-Sanskrit and anti-Hindi. Maraimalai's attempt to link "reason" to Saivism has proved to be a portent of later developments.

The battle over language is still very much alive and agitates even the most respectable scholars. Nilakanta Sastri, a Brahmin and the historian of South India most known in the West, has written:

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[25] Maraimalai Adigal, *Hindi Pothu Moliya*? Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1969, pp. 25-6.
[26] Maraimalai Adigal, "Introduction" to K. Appadurai, *India's Language Problem*, Tamil India Publications, n.d., pp. xvii-xviii.
[27] *Ibid.*, pp. xviii-xix.

> All the modern Indian languages. . .have developed from the beginning on a common background of culture furnished by Sanskrit language and literature. . . The Dravidian languages have survived in all their strength and have been vastly improved under the new influences.[28]

Meanwhile, the Jesudasons, both professors at Kerala University and highly respected Tamil Scholars, have written :

> Unlike all other Indian languages, what stands out among achievements of the Tamils is emphatically not from Sanskrit. Sophisticated and Sanskritised literature, so far as Tamil is concerned, has to be relegated to the second class.[29]

The next primordial sentiment is blood (Geertz) or ethnic origin (Bellah)—in short, race. From the stirring of this sentiment among Non-Brahmin Tamils has come the sense of belonging to the "Dravidian" race, a people separate from the Northern "Aryans" and from their own Brahmins. Here again Bishop Caldwell's book provides a key starting point. The first scholarly Europeans to come to India came into closest contact with the intellectual Brahmins. After an initial period of feeling that everyhing Indian was barbaric, the portentous discovery was made, by Max Muller and others, that Sanskrit was an Indo-Aryan language, related to the languages of the West. This was accompanied by a rise of racial consciousness in the West and although Mueller and others tried to separate language from race, the identification was made in most minds and still clings.

Caldwell made the same identification. He not only distinguished the South Indian languages as a related group, separate from those of the North, but he speculated that the people who spoke them belonged to a "Scythian" group that entered India through the Northwest passages of the sub-continent before the Aryans. Ironically, the word "Dravida," which Caldwell gave to these languages and people, is probably a Sanskritic corruption of the word "Tamil."[30] It was taken up by the British ethno-

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[28] Nilakanta Sastri, *Development of Religion in South India*, Madras : Orient Longmans, 1963, p. 5. I have not used Sastri as a historical source since he is as much protagonist as interpreter in the current debate on Tamil history.

[29] C. and H. Jesudason, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

[30] A. L. Basham, *Some Reflections on Dravidians and Aryans*, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

logist, H. A. Risley, and used to describe the 'race' found in Southern India.[31] Risley's misinformation has led to most unfortunate caricatures.

Curiously, the power of this racial myth was so strong, and the desirability of being an Aryan so great, that Charles Gover, with all his love of the South, denotes pages to 'proving' that the Dravidian peoples are really of the Aryan race! Otherwise, they would be inferior. He accepts Caldwell's thesis that the Dravidian speakers came to India first, but bitterly attacks the Bishop for failing to recognise that the Dravidian speakers are racially Aryan. He feels it is his duty to correct the record because of

> the necessity that the governing race should not be disqualified from performing its noble task by labouring under a complete mistake as to the nationality. . .of the people it rules.[32]

The feeling that to be Dravidian was to be inferior was stimulated by Southern Brahmins who—with their greater knowledge of Sanskrit and pan-Indian identification—called themselves Aryans. The North Indian renaissance also had an effect on Southern attitudes. For example, Romesh Chandra Dutt a Bengali scholar and translator of the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, wrote in 1900 of the conquest of India by the Aryans :

> This was a continuous war between the Indo-Aryans and the dark-skinned aborigines. . . . But the Aryans conquered in the end ; the area of civilization widened, waste and jungle lands were reclaimed and dotted with villages and towns and the barbarians either submitted to the conquerors or retreated. . . History repeats itself ; and the banks of the Indus were cleared of their non-Aryan races eighteen hundred years before Christ much in the same way in which the banks of the Mississippi have been cleared of their non-Aryan tribes, eighteen hundred years after Christ.[33]

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[31] "The Dravidians are distinguished by their low stature, black skin, long heads, broad noses, and long forearm from the rest of the inhabitants of India." H. A. Risley, *The Peoples of India*, p. 46. Quoted in T. R. Sesha Iyengar, *Dravidian India*, Madras : India Printing Works, 1925, pp. 23-4.

[32] Charles Gover, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

[33] Romesh C. Dutt, *The Civilization of India*, London : J. M. Dent and Co., 1900, p. 3.

Non-Brahmin Tamils saw themselves as those "barbarians," and the Northern awakening caused a strong reaction in the South.

For non-Aryan speakers the identity dilemma was acute. They responded in various ways. One was to consciously "Sanskritise," claiming a higher *varna* category for themselves and linking this with an Aryan origin myth, as Gover had done. This was merely a continuation and acceleration of an ages-old process of integration in Indian civilization. Another response was to develop an alternate myth of origin which glorified the Tamils—a form of Tamilisation or Dravidianisation. An old myth of a lost continent was dusted off and propagated. Maraimalai Adigal gave a typical rendition :

> From the time I read the ancient Tamil classics, I came to have a dim notion that the present Tamil country. . . could not have been more than a remnant of a vast continent now sunk in the Indian Ocean. . . This large continent an Englishman has called Lemuria. . . The language spoken by the first man there was Tamil.. .which had continued to live in all its vigour even after fifteen or twenty thousand years. . . . As has been shown by Dr. Caldwell. . .the words and phrases of the Tamil language can be seen. . .inwoven in the ancient languages all over the world.[34]

Again one can view the enormous influence of Bishop Caldwell on many aspects of the Tamil awakening.

A third way for the non-Brahmin Tamils to solve their sense of inferiority was also pioneered by British writers. This was to revert to the Caldwell thesis of a pre-Aryan invasion into India through the northwest passes of the sub-continent or by sea from Mesopotamia. The most influential book, after Caldwell, which presented this thesis was written by Gilbert Slater, a professor of Economics at Madras University from 1915 to 1922. Slater's book, *The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture*,[35] showed remarkable intuition in its insight that much of the pan-Indian civilisation

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[34] Maraimalai Adigal, "Introduction," K. Appadurai, *op. cit.*, pp. iv-v.

[35] Gilbert Slater, *The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture*, (London : Ernest Benn, Ltd., 1924. This debate continues with scholars such as Fürer-Haimendorf arguing for a migration by sea to South India from the Middle East.

seemed more 'Dravidian' than 'Aryan.' He also tried to separate racial from linguistic elements.[36]

This third alternative has proved to be the most long-lasting, largely because of the portentous discovery, in 1921-22 by Rakhal Das Banerji, of the ancient Indus Valley ruins. Indian history had to be rethought and rewritten. To many it now seemed that the Aryan-speakers were not responsible for all of India's culture. Indeed, they were viewed as nomadic late-comers to the sub-continent. It was only a step (but a step that has never been historically validated) to relate the "Dravidians" of the South to the Indus Valley civilization. Finds of what were interpreted as large baths, images of a "proto-Siva," signs of a "mother goddess" and other remains aided in this identification.

Two books which gained wide circulation among the literate public of the Madras Presidency demonstrate how quickly this identification took place. T. R. Sesha Iyengar, a Tamil Brahmin, published his *Dravidian India* in 1925. Quoting a 1924 article by Sir John Marshall, Director of the Indian Archaeological Department and a major expert on the Indus finds, Iyengar wrote of a "shrine with walls seven or eight feet thick pierced by many conduits which might have served the purpose of carrying the lustral water when the shrine or image within it was washed." [37] He then spoke of Marshall's discussion of the Indus seals with their undecipherable pictographs. After several pages the influential identification was made : "We also find a striking resemblance between the finds of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro and those of Adichannalur and other pre-historic sites in South India." [38] Iyengar rejected the view that these Dravidians came from outside the sub-continent. For him, the Indus Valley remains portrayed a pre-Aryan indigenous civilization, of which the South Indians were the remnant :

> It is perhaps not too bold to assert that future discoveries and dispassionate researchers may ultimately lead to the universal acceptance of the view that the Dravidians were living in South India from the remotest antiquity.[39]

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[36] "The word 'Dravidian' indicates a linguistic rather than a racial section of the people of India." *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[37] T. R. Sesha Iyengar, *Dravidian India, op. cit.*, pp. 34-5.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Iyengar seems restrained, however, if one looks at *Tamil India*, written in 1927 by M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, another of the renaissance scholar. He combined Caldwell, Slater, the Lemuria legend, and the new Indus discoveries. On the latter he wrote :

> Recent discoveries at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro in Sind testify to the existence of a civilized state, of well-built cities three or four millennia before the Christian era. . . At the time of the Aryan invasion through the northwest, it was Dravidian kingdoms which flourished in Northern India . . . .Even at a later day the ancestors of Rama and Buddha were probably of Dravidian extraction. . . .[40]

Father Heras, a Spanish Jesuit missionary added fuel to the already leaping flames. The first volume of his influential work, *Studies in Proto-Indo-Mediterranean Culture*,[41] came out only in 1953, but he had been popularising his ideas for more than two decades. This controversial scholar claimed that the Tamils were the purest descendants of the Indus Valley people and had best preserved their culture. He attempted to translate the mysterious script of the seals and gave it the name "proto-Tamil." He also related present Tamil festivals and folk life to the Indus Civilization. Furthermore, he carried through more systematically than had any scholar before him, the conviction that there is a basic pre-Aryan cultural and ethnic unity of the entire area from India to Ireland, including such peoples as the Etruscans and Sumerians !

The Indus Valley discoveries came at exactly the moment that non-Brahmin Tamil consciousness had awakened to a new involvement with history. Tamil non-Brahmins could now claim that they were the original inhabitants of the sub-continent and that marauding "Aryans," who were North Indians and Southern Brahmins, had subjugated them for centuries. The "Dravidian power" movement gained new "evidence" just when it was most psychologically needed.

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[40] M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil India*, Madras : South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1927, p. 26.

[41] H. Heras, S.J., *Studies in Proto-Indo-Mediterranean Culture*, Bombay : Indian Historical Research Institute, 1953.

As with the linguistic myth, the racial debate still rages, intertwined with the former. Even a moderate contemporary Tamil view reflects this consciousness :

> After the discovery of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro and the connection between the Indus Valley Civilization and the pre-Aryan South which most historians now conceded, Indian history should properly begin with a Southern base.[42]

The Illustrated Weekly of India carried an article in 1972 by a Bengali writer asking 'Was Ravana a Dravidian ?' The writer concluded that he wasn't because he spoke Sanskrit to Hanuman ![43] On a supposedly more scholarly plane, S. R. Rao, Superintendent of the Indian Archaeological Department, has insisted that he has deciphered the Indus script and it is Indo-European.[44] In 1971, the Third International Tamil Conference was held in Paris. I. Mahadevan, a brilliant Tamil Brahmin, had been awarded a Nehru Fellowship to continue his work in translating the Indus script. Mahadevan felt the language was related to Tamil but the D.M.K. government in Madras—strong "Dravidianists"—were fearful that the Brahmin Mahadevan would present an "Aryan" interpretation. They demanded his speech be submitted to the Tamil Legislative Assembly before funds for his trip to Paris were approved. Thus, Mahadevan's speech became an "official assurance" placed before the House.[45]

This is not a controversy I want to enter into since it is the Tamils' perception of themselves the interests me. However, only recently, Russian and Finnish teams, with the aid of computers, have hypothesised that the script is proto-Tamil. They have mentioned a possible parallel with ancient Elamite and have used Tamil to aid their research.[46] Shades of Caldwell ! When one

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[42] A. M. Sattanathan, "The Southern Point of View in Indian History and Politics," *Anna* 60, Madras : Dravidian Publishing, 1968, p. 144.

[43] R. S. Chakravarthy, "Was Ravana a Dravidian ?" *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 26 March 1972.

[44] S. R. Rao, "Indus Script Deciphered," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 12 December 1971, pp. 21-5. A fairly recent article in the *Scientific American*, by a distinguished scholar argues that the language is "early Dravidian". Walter A. Fairservis, Jr., "The Script of the Indus Valley Civilization," *Scientific American*, March 1983, pp. 58-66.

[45] Tamil Nadu Legislature, *Paper Placed on the Table of the House*, Committee on Government Assurance, Assurance No. 956/71, 1971.

[46] See *The Journal of Tamil Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Madras : International Association of Tamil Research, May, 1970.

of the team, Pentii Aalto, wrote of these conclusions in a leading Madras newspaper, *The Hindu*, letters of protest from Tamil Brahmins poured in.[47] One rather moderate letter dismisses the Finns : " The results of their researches. . .failed to cut much ice since their derivations are based on computer readings."[48]

Further archaeological discoveries will come and perhaps the Indus script will be deciphered. Perhaps, to the delight of the Tamils, a " Harappan " city will be uncovered in Tamil Nadu. In any event, more light will eventually be thrown on the whole thorny but fascinating problem. Unfortunately, while cultural considerations remain a legitimate scholarly topic, the debate in Tamil Nadu, among scholars and laymen, centres round racial issues. A. L. Basham has written, and virtually all ethnologists would agree, that " in scientific usage there is Dravidian race and no Aryan race but the two terms are used only in linguistic and perhaps cultural contexts. "[49] Primordial sentiments, however, are no respectors of scientific usage and " Dravidian "—" Aryan " antagonism is strong in India.

The third primordial sentiment is religion (Bellah) or Custom (Geertz). I shall concentrate on the Indian institution of " caste," both *varna* and *jati* (*kulam* in Tamil), which is both religion and custom. This will be a brief discussion of a very complex topic. In Chapter Two it was stated that Brahmins were welcomed by local Tamil rulers as the bearers of what seemed to be a superior culture. They were often given lands and many gained economic and political power. As Sanskritic and Brahminic influences spread in the South, significant differences from Northern social structures emerged.[50] The Northern *jati* and *varna* structure had been worked out earlier against a different backdrop. In Tamil Nadu, using a " purist " view of the *varna* system, except for the Brahmins, there were no twice-born *varnas*. Everyone, in his prejudiced view, below the Brahmins was classified either as a Sudra or as an

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[47] *The Hindu*, Madras, 1 June 1969 ; 4 January 1970 ; 22 March 1970.
[48] B. Lakshminarayana, " India Civilization," *The Hindu*, 13 January 1970.
[49] A. L. Basham, " Reflections . . . , " *op. cit.*, p. 226.
[50] " *Varna* came to the . . . South comparatively late for the earliest Tamil literature shows a society divided into tribal groups with little sense of the precedence of one over the other. Succeeding centuries saw the gradual hardening of class until the South Indian Brahmins became even stricter in their ritual observances and untouchables even more debased than in the North." A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

outcaste. In Modern Tamil Nadu the Brahmins represent only three per cent of the population and outcastes are around eighteen per cent.[51] In Tamil Nadu, it makes much more sense to divine the *varnas* or *jatis* into three broad categories—Brahmins, non-Brahmins, and untouchables—rather than by the traditional *varna* distinctions.[52]

Tamil Brahmins fall into two main categories, Sri Vaishnavas and Smartas. The first are followers of Ramanuja and they have two major sub-sects, Vadagalai and Tengalai. The Smartas follow the philosopher Sankara's *Advaita* system and are often called Saivites. This is not strictly true but the appelation is understandable :

> The Smarta ritual involves the worship of not one but five representative deities : Vishnu, Siva, Surya, Ganesa and Durga. . . The group of five is truly eclectic, though slightly weighted towards Siva as the Smarta tradition itself has been since Puranic times.[53]

While the Sri Vaishnavas represent very significant cultural and social force, it is the Smartas who were the major " brokers " for the British, forming the backbone of the Indian Civil Service and of the early Congress movement in Tamil Nadu.

The untouchables, or Harijans, are of three main *jatis* : the Tamil-speaking Pallans and Paraiyans (hence the English word ' pariah ') who are agricultural workers, and the leather working Telugu-speaking Chakkiliyars. While, as has been noted, the outcastes are numerous, they played virtually on role in the Tamil renaissance.

For viewing the Tamil awakening, the ' middle castes '—or non-Brahmins—are the most important. If one looks at the names of those who sparked the renaissance it will be noticed that many of the names end with the suffix ' Pillai '. This is primarily a

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[51] Andre Beteille, *Castes, Old and New*, Bombay : Asia, 1969, p. 187.

[52] ' This threefold grouping of castes is characteristic of Tamilnad and, by and large, of South India as a whole. It does not seem to have the same significance in North India.' Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class, and Power*, Berkeley : University of California, 1965, p. 15.

[53] Thomas J. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, Belmont City : Dickenson, 1971, pp. 120-1.

title for the ubiquitous *jati* of Vellalas. The Mudaliars are a closely allied group ; it is often claimed that Vellalas in the Northern districts of Tamil Nadu use Mudaliar as a title while those in the southern districts add Pillai, but this is not universally true. A British official, H. A. Stuart, writing in the Madras Census report of 1891, has as good one-line description of the Vellalas as can be found : " The Vellala are the great farmer caste of the Tamil country and they are strongly represented in every Tamil district."[54] They are " farmers " not peasants, and while they are present in virtually every district, they have regional divisions across which they do not marry. Furthermore, 'Pillai' and 'Mudaliar' are terms which many groups, throughout history, have adopted. Vellala status has been a desired one for centuries in Tamil Nadu. There are several Tamil proverbs which comment, perhaps unfairly, on this. One compares the Vellala to a favourite Tamil vegetable, the *brinjal*—' it will mix with anything.'[55]

When the process of upward mobility takes place, it represente both Sanskritisation and Tamilisation. The Vellalas are Sanskritised. Brahmins usually officiate at their weddings, they cremate their dead, observe the fifteen day pollution rule, and they usually decline alcohol and meat.[56] But they also have their own *pandarams* or priests, have been historically associated with *Saiva Siddhanta* philosophy, and they treasure the legend that they were the original Tamils. One of their traditional tasks has been that of village *karnams* or accountants. Thus, their male literacy rate, while far below that of the Brahmins, was significantly higher than other Non–Brahmins.[57]

Vellalas had long been unhappy at being called Sudras and the British insistance on classifying groups by *varna* categories heated up the protests. As early as the 1871 Census, Vellalas petitioned to be listed under the Vaisya category. Their appeal to the Municipal Commissioner of Madras stated :

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[54] Quoted in Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India,* vol. VII, Madras : Government Press, 1909, p. 361.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 374.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] Their double-role of being 'brokers' for the Brahmins and yet also being sturdy farmers is illustrated by two proverbs : 'Agriculture is no agriculture unless it is performed by the Vellalas' and 'Though apparently the Vellala will not ruin you the palm leaf on which he writes about you will ruin you forever.' *Ibid*, pp. 388-9.

> It is impossible to imagine that the Vellalas, a race (sic) of agriculturists, should have had to render menial service to the three higher classes; for the very idea of service is, as it must needs be, revolting to the Vellala whose profession teaches him perfect independence. . . . Hence a Velala cannot be of the Sudra or servile class. . . . . .[58]

The resentment grew and became more directed against the Brahmins.

Kanakasabhai Pillai, in his pioneering 1904 book, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, wrote :

> The Brahmins, who had begun to settle in Tamilaham at least five or six centuries earlier than the period which I describe, tried to foist their caste system on the Tamils. . . . (They) single out the Vellalas and state they have no other calling than the cultivation of the soil. . . . This is the first attempt made by the Brahmins to bring the Tamils under their caste system. But in the absence of the Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra castes in Tamilaham they could not possibly succeed. . . .[59]

There were other culture reasons for the middle caste resentment of the Brahmins. The ethos of Brahmins differed from non-Brahmins. For example, Brahmins use the *gotra* kinship structure which links extended families to ancient *rishis*, and these seers were "Aryans" figures. In dress, Brahmin men wore their *veshtis* tucked in at five places, in Northern fashion. Even language differs. "Brahmin Tamil" is often liberally spiced with Sanskrit. In North India where vertical spread was greater, none of these differences would have been felt as strongly as they were in the South.

Of course, economic disparities played a major role in non-Brahmin feeling. Andre Beteille, a brilliant Indian anthropologist, has pointed out that even though, unlike those in much of India, Tamil Brahmins often were substantial landowners it was not so much the amount of land which caused dislike as an important ritual factor :

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[58] *Ibid*, pp. 366-7.
[59] V. Kanaksabhai Pillai, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

> Brahmin landowners. . .have been related to the productive organisation in a significantly different way from the Non-Brahmins since they are barred by scriptural injunction from the actual work of tillage. Hence a Brahmin who owns even a small parcel of land had to depend for labour on Non-Bramins and Harijans. . . . The majority of Non-Brahmin landowners are peasants, farmers, tenants or agricultural labourers. . . Among Brahmin landowners, on the other hand, a large proportion consists of rentiers and many are absentee landlords. This contrast between Brahmin and Non-landowners, arising from differences not so much in size of holding as in style of life, has played a most important part in the development of the Non-Brahmin movement.[60]

The combination of structural and cultural factors began to " politicize " non–Brahmins, quickening their primordial identities. The quest for new meaning and identity was now to be acted out on the battleground of politics.[61] This political activity was ' modern ' but it was based on traditional ascriptive *jati* groupings.

The rising non-Brahmin elite in Madras Presidency became increasingly frightened of that amazing Irish woman, Annie Besant. Deeply interested in classical Indian culture, she had founded the Theosophical Society in Madras and in 1915 organized the Home Rule Movement. Interred by the British, she was released in 1917 and in December of that year she was elected President of the Indian National Congress. Soon she was to be eclipsed by the rise of Mohandas Gandhi. Mrs. Besant's contacts were mainly South Indian Brahmins and her interpretation of Indian culture was a highly Sanskritised one. Non-Brahmin groups in Madras Presidency feared that Home Rule, or any type of independence,

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[60] Andre Beteille, *Castes Old and New*, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

[61] The political aspect of the Brahmin-Non-Brahmin conflict has been the most widely researched aspect of the Tamil renaissance. For example, see Andrew Beteille, *Castes Old and New*, *op. cit.*, especially Chapter 6 ; Robert Hardgrave, Jr., *The Dravidian Movement*, Bombay : Popular Prakashan, 1965, especially Chapter 3 ; Eugene Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, *op. cit.* ; Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1967, especially Part I ; David Washbrook, ' Country Politics : Madras 1880-1930,' in Gallagher, Johnson, and Seal, *Locality Province and Nation*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1973. Nicholas Dirks did an excellent unpublished B.A. thesis for Wesleyan University on this topic in 1971-72.

would mean Brahmin domination. Thus they reacted against Mrs. Besant and the Congress.

In 1916 a group of upperclass non-Brahmins banded together and issued a *Non-Brahmin Manifesto*.[62] The statement concentrated on economic grievances and it stressed the benefits that had come to Brahmins under British rule.[63] Some of the figures which appeared in the *Manifesto* are as follows: In the Civil Service examination of Madras Presidency from 1892-1904, fifteen of sixteen successful candidates were Brahmins. Out of twenty-one successful candidates for Assistant Engineer, seventeen were Brahmins. Seventy-seven out of one hundred and forty Deputy Collectors were Brahmins as were ninety-three out of one hundred and twenty-eight District Munsiffs. In 1914, of the five Indian judges of the Madras High Court, four were Brahmins. In 1914, the total number of registered graduates of the University of Madras (founded in 1857) was six hundred and fifty, of whom four hundred and fifty were Brahmins, one hundred and twenty-four non-Brahmin Hindus, and seventy-four belonged to "other communities"—Muslims, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians.

Southern Brahmins were also dominant in the Madras branch of the Indian National Congress :

> of the fifteen gentlemen elected from this Presidency to represent it on the All India Congress Committee, with the exception of one solitary Non-Brahmin Indian, all are. . . . Brahmins, and yet the decisions of this committee. . . upon matters of grave import such as the revision of the Indian Constitution after the war, will be held up to the world's admiring gaze as the considered opinions, among others, of the forty millions of Non-Brahmins of this large and important Province.[64]

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[62] Printed in *The Hindu*, 20 December 1916 and in Irschick, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-67.

[63] Ainslie Embree has pointed out that in the 1881 Census, 95 per cent of the population was illiterate. He goes on, however, to say, 'But this figure is misleading because it conceals facts of profound importance for the social and political history of India . . . . The Brahmins in Madras had a male literacy rate of 72 per cent, in Bombay 65 per cent, and in Bengal 50 per cent despite the fact that large numbers lived in rural areas.' Ainslie T. Embree, *India's Search for National Identity*, New York: Knopf, 1972, p. 16.

[64] *Non-Brahmin Manifesto*, *op. cit.*

The non-Brahmin elite developed English and vernacular newspapers and in August of 1917 established a political party, the South Indian Liberal Federation, which became known as the Justice Party after it's English language newspaper, *Justice*. The party argued for "communal representation" (that is, special seats assigned in elections and competitive posts for different religious and caste groups). In 1919 the party sent a strong delegation to England to argue their case before the Parliamentary committee dealing with the Government of India Bill. The British, for mixed reasons, supported this and so the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1920 were promulgated with communal representation an integral part of them. The Congress, now under Gandhi, urged a boycott of the elections but the electorate in Madras, restricted as in all India by property and educational qualifications, voted in large numbers and the Justice Party gained a considerable victory. Government Orders (G.O.'s) providing for communal representation were promulgated in 1921 and 1922. New Non-Brahmin universities were founded for both Tamils and Telugus. In 1923 the Justice Party won again. By 1926 a group of Congressmen called the Swarajists won but refused to form a ministry. A prominent Justicite headed a non-party government. In 1930, the Justice Party came back, largely because the Congress refused to contest since their Civil Disobedience campaign was in full swing. In 1937 the Congress finally formed a ministry under the Tamil Brahmin and Indian Congress leader, C. Rajagopalachari.

Although the Justice Party had highlighted economic grievances in the *Non-Brahmin Manifesto*, a look at the party's literature demonstrates how important cultural factors were. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the Justicites reaction to Gandhi. Gandhi's early speeches in Madras inflamed Non-Brahmin resentment. Here is an example :

> No non-cooperator can be a real non-cooperator who does not believe in God. . . I am aware that the Non-Brahmins of Madras have many things to say against Brahmins for which there is some cause. . But let Non-Brahmins realize that by quarelling with Brahmins. . . they will not better their lot but will degrade Hinduism itself. . . . The grievances of Non-Brahmins against Brahmins are a mere nothing compared to the grievances of Adi-Dravidas (outcastes). . .

> against Hinduism. Hinduism has made them sort of lepers .... Non-Brahmins are equally guilty with Brahmins in making them crawl on their bellies. It is my deliberate conviction that we are suffering this yoke of slavery for the sake of the sins that we have committed against our brothers who we arrogantly consider to be untouchable. Therefore, I invite the Brahmins and the Non-Brahmins of this Presidency to battle against the curse of untouchability and rid ourselves of it. I ask you not to mix up inter-marriage and inter-dining with untouchability.[65]

One sees the paradox of Gandhi at that time. In one breath he spoke prophetic judgment on all castes for their treatment of the outcastes. In the next breath, however, he assumed his audience wanted to defend Hinduism and, above all, he separates the issues of inter-marriage and inter-dining from the issue of untouchability. By doing so he proclaimed himself a defender of *varnashrama dharma*. Later Gandhi was to modify these views, but these early utterances alienated many Tamil non-Brahmins.[66] A typical quotation from *Justice*, portrays the non-Brahmin reaction to Gandhi :

> Let those who are comforted by the Mahatma's admiration for his Brahmin friends "Who are the repositories of all knowledge and the embodiment of sacrifice" and his praise of *Varnashrama Dharma* follow the Mahatma's lead. We shall agree to differ.[67]

In 1927 *Justice* made a parallel between itself and the Protestant Reformation :

> The movement which we see in Southern India today, for the uplift of non-Brahmins and for their freedom from priestly influences, is only a portion of that world movement which is aimed at giving the largest freedom not merely to the body but even more to the soul.... That the priesthood in this country is confined to a particular caste has merely aggravated the evil.... We may be accused of communalism but we venture to think that those who are engaged in the

[65] *The Hindu*, Madras, 9 April 1921.
[66] For a good discussion of Gandhi and caste, see Dennis Dalton, "The Gandhian View of Caste and Caste after Gandhi," in Philip Mason, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-81.
[67] *Justice*, 14 September 1927.

> task of removing a. . . .highly developed priesthood. . .are shattering the citadel of communalism. . . . .[68]

Charles Gover's 1872 reference to a " silent Reformation " becomes articulated in this quotation but the articulation has come as a result of the impact of the West. No longer is it Gover's orthogenetic reformation.

Gandhi was correct, however, in his reference to the Justicites' failure to speak to the outcastes. The Justice Party always represented an elite and Westernised middle class.[69] This inability to recruit outcaste support was a major reason for the eventual collapse of the Party. It should be added, however, that when " lower " groups Sanskritised and Westernised enough to gain admission to this elite non-Brahmin group, they were accepted. A figure such as W. P. Soundarapandian Nadar, from the once ' low ' but upwardly mobile Nadar *jati*, was a good example of this. He played a major role in Justice politics. The outcastes, however, remained un-Sanskritised, non-Westernised, and largely non-politicised.

By the mid-thirties, with the success of the Civil disobedience campaign, Madras—at least on the surface—was in the national mainstream. Unique currents flowed beneath the surface, however. Non-Brahmins were much more prominent in the administration of the Province and many groups were more politicised than they had been twenty years before. Non-Brahmins had entered the Congress ranks in fairly large numbers. One of the most significant of these recruits was the young Nadar, K. Kamaraj, who began his Congress career (he was to become All-India Congress President) as a protege of the Brahmin leader, Satyamurti. Political leaders had become more aware of, and accountable to, mass participation and interests. Vernacular languages had a new importance in the body politic. In the fabric of the new political consciousness of the Presidency there was a seam which divided

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[68] *Justice*, October 1927. British and Indian scholars spent much of their time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries looking for analogies to the Protestant Reformation.

[69] " The Non-Brahmin movement of Madras Presidency is no other than the movement of the later educated middle classes, who happen to be Non-Brahmins, against the earlier educated middle class who happened to be Brahmins," K. B. Krishna, *The Problem of Minorities*, London : 1930, pp. 154-5, quoted in Beteille, *Castes Old and New*, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

those with primarily All-India concerns from those with a mainly regional emphasis. This seam was not as strongly stitched together as it seemed to be in the enthusiasm engendered by Gandhi's later Congress Campaigns. The same division which was demonstrated in the literary renaissance was present in political life also.

This chapter has attempted to view the rise of modernisation with reference to a new cultural consciousness—modernisation as defined by Bellah and Whitehead as a "new mentality." While much of the vibrant Tamil consciousness was gained from the impact of the West, that consciousness was related, both historically and in the minds of the participants, to earlier Tamil traditions and conflicts. Romantic nationalism built on and stimulated the primordial sentiments of language, race and caste.

This chapter began by utilising Ramalingaswamy as a human metaphor for the social and cultural situation of Tamil Nadu in the mid-eighteen hundreds. It will close with another "human recapitulation of a social transformation," Bharati Dasan. While he is a historical figure (1891-1963), he also can serve as a metaphor. Both he and Ramalingaswamy can be seen as symbols of the Tamil renaissance—the one preshadowing it, the other a product of it. Both were catalysts for it. The world views they expressed and the ethos emanating from each are, however, different. Most non-Brahmin Tamils who have participated in the Tamil awakening find themselves standing somewhere between these two symbolic personages.

Bharati Dasan was born into a high caste non-Brahmin family who lived in the French enclave of Pondicherry. His name was Kanaka Subburathinam. After his university studies he taught Tamil for many years at the Pondicherry Government College. A turning point in his life came when he was twenty-one years old and met the great Subramania Bharati, who had fled from the British to Pondicherry. He showed Subramania Bharati a poem in praise of the Goddess *Shakti* and Bharati immediately recognised his talent. Subburathinam became Bharati Dasan—the slave (or devotee) of Bharati. From Subramania, Bharati Dasan gained not only poetic influences, but a deep love for the Tamil language, a hatred of inequality based on caste or sex, and a desire to participate in politics. But he differed from his master in that he rejected

the all-India aspects of Bharati's concerns and stressed the regional glories of Tamil Nadu.

In his early poems, such as *Azhagin Sirippu* (*The Smile of Beauty*) and *Pandyan Parisu* (*The Gift of the Pandyan*), he continued to develop the 'new Tamil' pioneered by his mentor and other earlier scholars. He also stressed social and political themes. In *Puratchikavi* (*The Revolutionary Poet*), one can see many of these themes. The poem takes its central incident from Kambar's *Ramayana*. Bharati Dasa of course, reworks the incident. Utharan, a young Tamil tutor of the Princess Amathavalli, falls in love with her but they are of different castes. The princess suggests that she and her lover should sacrifice their lives so that they might change the hearts of those who, in the name of caste and wealth, "would thwart true love and treat the lowly with contempt." The king hears of the romance and orders Utharan's death.

> Utharan turns to the people, for the people are more important than the king—the voice of the people is the voice of God. He tells them that. . .he and the princess had learned to love each other even as they loved the beauty of Tamil poetry. "Is the love of sweet Tamil to be the cause of my death ?". . . . The people rush to the rescue and overthrow the king. "All wealth, all ownership belong the people," they declare and proceed to draw up a democratic constitution.[70]

Radical socialism and romantic nationalism are combined and the resulting mixture was to prove heady stuff indeed for young upwardly mobile Tamils. The ethos and world view of the young DMK is portrayed in the above lines.

Increasingly, Bharati Dasan stressed the primordial sentiments of romantic nationalism and in doing so he created a powerful critique of religion. Some of his lines remind one of the *siddhars* :

> It's not a Tamil principle
> To worship stone and copper
> Tamil seeks after and sings the virtue
> Of good conduct and honour (*Manam*).

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[70] S. V. Gunasegaran, "The Poet of Revolt," *Tamil Culture*, Madras, April-June, 1959, p. 76

Caste and religion are not Tamil
Tamil has never accepted caste and religion.
" They " means " enmity " and
The word " Thevar " (God) comes from " Thev. "[71]

Race and language are often linked in his poetry :

Killing the letter of a language is killing
the language itself.
Killing the language is killing the literature.
Killing the literature is the same as killing the race.
The reason for killing the race is to steal the land of the
Tamils.
This is the intention of the people of the North.[72]

Almost always traditional religion is criticised but there is a certain ambiguity in his discussion of " God " :

It is easy for me to show you God,
And it is easy for you to believe him.
You have seen the holy images
Which sculptors created ;
they are not gods. . .all these
Don't say gods ;
Anything that Hinduism says is God is not God.
Even that which Christianity says is not God.
Even the sound that comes from reciting the *Koran* is not
God.
God has neither figure nor name.
God doesn't receive any offering.
Only the sense of serving the public is God.[73]

Bharati Dasan, dead since 1963, remains controversial. Writing of him in *The Illustrated Weekly* in 1972, the Tamil Brahmin, V. Swaminathan, said,

The Dravidian movement and the poet were in perfect harmony with each other and were characterized by an

[71] Bharati Dasan, *Panmanitheral* (*A Collection of Poems*), Madras : Mutamil Selvi Achagam, 1964, p. 66. This and the following translations have been done by myself and by Mrs. Sethumani Manian, Tamil lecturer at Lady Doak College, Madurai, India.

[72] *Ibid*., p. 242.

[73] *Ibid*., p. 162.

> absence of intellectual element, inability to distinguish between irrational sentiment and objective truth. . . .[74]

Swaminathan recognizes Bharati's relation to the past, however:

> What made him a poet was not. . .profundity of thought. . . . or any original vision ; an intimate acquaintance with the Tamil classics. . . .were, I think, responsible for his emergence as a poet.[75]

Less than a week later, *The Rising Sun*, official paper of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, counter-attacked :

> Mr. Swaminathan's. . . . .article reveals that he. . .persists . . .to hoist men of his own class on a high literary pedestal by decrying eminent writers of Dravidian stock and praising his own breed quite out of proportion to their literary attainments. This is an old gimmic which Mr. Swaminathan's forebears attempted against the great Dravidian Tamil scholars and miserably failed.[76]

One can feel the contemporary conflict of Tamil Nadu in this exchange.

For all the differences between the world view and ethos of Bharati Dasan and Ramalingaswamy, there is a common contribution to Tamil and a common hatred of caste divisions. As has been pointed out, one can find at least traces of these sentiments throughout Tamil history, but Bharati Dasan connects race and language, regional loyalty to economic issues. He links romantic nationalism and radical socialism. This was done by many Tamil scholars and leaders of the eventful century between Ramalingaswamy and Bharati Dasan and this is why these two are useful human metaphors for the Tamil awakening and for the process of modernisation in Tamil Nadu. Of greatest importance, for a scholar of religion, Bharati Dasan saw Hinduism—and all institutionalised religion—as an enemy of social and economic justice. In this, Bharati Dasan is not only a symbol of the Tamil renaissance that had occurred ; he points to the direction in which part of that awakening was moving.

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[74] V. Swaminathan, "Bharati Dasan," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 9 January 1972, p. 43.

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] *The Rising Sun*, 14 January 1972, p. 11.

CHAPTER IV

E. V. RAMASWAMY NAICKER : ADVOCATE OF RADICAL SOCIALISM

Bharati Dasan was deeply influenced by a remarkable Tamil leader, E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker. This chapter will view Naicker as one of those who, to use Geertz's words, "if they did not wholly make up the history of their times . . . they surely embodied it."[1] Ramaswamy Naicker, called Periyar (The Great Man), is a metaphor, summing up and embodying much recent Tamil history. It was he who popularized "radical socialism" in Tamil Nadu in a manner that spoke to many Tamils.

Madras City, Christmas Day, 1973. Three o'clock in the afternoon. The body of the ninety-four year old "Great Man" was raised from its platform and taken down the steps of Rajaji Hall—a hall named for Periyar's great Brahmin antagonist, C. Rajagopalachari, who had died almost precisely a year earlier. A ninety-minute funeral procession wended its way through the centre of Madras while hundreds of thousands of Tamils crowded close to the cortege. At times the crowds were unmanageable. Black-shirted followers and khaki-clad police joined together to control the hysterical masses. Twenty-five thousand people packed *Periyar Thidal* at the junction of Poonamallee High Road and Rundall's Road. Thousands more stood outside, unable to enter. Members of the Madras High Court were present as were members of Tamil Nadu's Cabinet and a saffron robed *swami*, Kunrakkudi Adigalar. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M. Karunanidhi, wept as the body was taken from its tractor-drawn trailer and put in the coffin. K. Kamaraj, former Chief Minister, former head of India's Congress Party, long-time opponent of Karunanidhi, placed his arms around the Chief Minister while tears poured down his face. The young disciple of Periyar, K. Veeramani, who would inherit his leadersip of the Dravida Kazhagam, virtually collapsed and Karunanidhi went to support him, handing

[1] C. Geertz, *Islam Observed*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

the old leader's eyeglasses to him as he did so. As the police fired three volleys over the grave and the buglers sounded the last post, the coffin was lowered. Thousands wailed, "Ayya, Ayya, oh Ayya."[2]

A major and colourful figure in the contemporary history of South India had passed away, although the controversy swirling around his turbulent life continues. E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker (known as "E.V.R." as well as "Periyar") was born in the small Tamil city of Erode on September 17, 1879. His father, a middle caste and middle class Naicker of Telugu ancestry, was a fairly well off contractor. Young Ramaswamy, however, was brought up by his father's aunt and only spent three or four years in school. As he put it, 'The purpose of sending me to school was not so much for my education; it was perhaps with the intention of preventing me from indulging in what they considered to be delinquencies.'[3] By the time he was twelve he became involved in his father's business and at age nineteen he was married to a girl named Nagammai in a traditional ceremony. But he was restless. At twenty-five, he became a wandering *sannyasi*, travelling with two Brahmins and performing *kalakshepams*. Finally, he found himself in Benares working for a *math* by collecting leaves for *puja*. He was fired when it was discovered he wasn't taking his morning bath, and he wended his way back to Erode. He was later to be known for his hatred of the "three B's," baths, barbers and Brahmins.

His father died in 1911 and E.V.R became an important businessman in his own right. He was even head of a *devasthanam* committee. He became associated with the moderate Madras Presidency Association of Thiru Vee Kaa. At the same time that C. Rajagopalachari was chairman of the nearby Salem Municipal Council, E.V.R. was elected chairman in Erode. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) was instrumental in getting him into the Congress Party and both resigned their chairmanships at the time of the Amritsar massacre. E.V.R. campaigned for the non-cooperation movement

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[2] This material was drawn from eyewitnesses, from *The Madras Rationalist*, January 1974, Vol. III, No. 5, pp. 5-7 and *The Indian Express*, 26 December 1973.

[3] An Admirer, *Periyar E. V. Ramasami : A Pen Portrait*, Erode : Rationalist Publications, 1962, pp. 3-4.

of Gandhi and in 1921 went to jail when he picketed toddy shops in Erode. In 1924 he was elected president of the Tamil Nad Congress Committee (TNCC) and soon he and his wife went to Vaikom in the nearby princely state of Travancore to protest the ban on the use by untouchables of the roads near the big temple. E.V.R. offered *satyagraha* and was jailed twice. He returned to Tamil Nadu acclaimed as *Vaikom Virar*, the hero of Vaikom. Soon after his return he was jailed again for defending *khadi*, the homespun cotton which Gandhi was propagating.

In 1925 he became involved in the famous Gurukulum dispute. Gurukulum was an orphanage run by V. V. S. Iyer, a well-known Brahmin Congressman. Brahmin and non-Brahmin students were segregated for meals. E.V.R. protested and as head of the TNCC refused to pay the amount due Gurukulum for its operating expenses. V. V. S. Iyer obtained the additional funds from other sources and Rajagopalachari seemed to support Iyer. I have already mentioned Gandhi's support of separate eating facilities. Soon after, at the Conjeevaram Conference of the Congress, E.V.R. proposed communal representation for the Congress Committee. His proposal was defeated and E.V.R. left the Congress forever.

In 1926 he participated in the non-Brahmin Conference at Madurai which brought him into contact with the Justice Party. E.V.R soon founded the Self-Respect Movement, a social action group aimed at eradicating untouchability and caste. The Self-Respect Movement rested on five pillars : (1) No God, (2) No religion, (3) No Gandhi, (4) No Congress, (5) No Brahmins. During this period he was arrested several times for leading public agitations. In 1931 he went on a long European tour where he was especially impressed by the Soviet Union. Soon after his return he was imprisoned for sedition and was in the Coimbatore jail with Rajagopalachari. As was pointed out earlier, Rajaji became Chief Minister of the Presidency in 1937, after Congress won the elections and agreed to form a ministry. One of his first moves, in those days of heady nationalism, was to introduce a bill for the compulsory teaching of Hindi in the Presidency. Periyar fought a highly publicised and successful campaign against this measure. While in jail for this agitation, he was elected president of the moribund Justice Party, which had been routed in the elections. In April 1939, he met with the Cripps Commission which

was investigating greater Home Rule for India and he urged a separate 'Dravidanad' for the Dravidian-speaking peoples. Later, he discussed these views with M. A. Jinnah, who was backing a separate Pakistan, and with the famous Harijan leader, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Neither was interested in the Dravidanad idea, but Naicker continued to be interested in Ambedkar.

At Salem, in 1944, E.V.R. officially transformed the formerly elitist Justice Party into a mass organisation renamed the Dravida Kazhagam (D.K.) or Dravidian Federation and he decreed that members should wear black shirts as a symbol of the degradation of the Tamils. At the 1945 Trichy Conference, the D.K. adopted as its symbol a black flag, with a red circle in the centre, black for the 'subjugated' state of the Dravidians and red for the hope of future justice enshrined in a coming Dravidanad. At this 1945 conference, the party took an important step by calling for a completely independent Dravidanad, freed from both British and Northern rule. Despite the demand for Dravidanad, the emphasis of the D.K. was to remain more on social reform than on strictly political activity. Naicker had not changed from his Self-Respect days. Especially important to the movement was widow remarriage and intercaste marriages. Journals and newspapers of the movement, such as *Kudiarasu* (*Republic*), *Puratchi* (*Revolt*), and *Viduthalai* (*Freedom*), were formed and gained increased readership.

When Indian Independence came, in 1947, Naicker urged Tamils to treat August 15, Independence Day, as a day of misery since he had failed to get separate nationhood for Dravidanad. Then, in 1949, sixteen years after his wife of thirty-five years had died, he married Maniammai, a woman forty years his junior. This created a furor in conservative Tamil Nadu and also seemed, to many of his followers, to violate his reformist views. This act, coupled with his view toward Independence and his growingly authoritarian ways, led to a split in the movement. In 1949 his young lieutenant, C. N. Annadurai, broke away to found the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.—Progressive Dravidian Federation). Naicker wasn't daunted. In 1950 he boycotted the adoption of India's Constitution and in 1951 pressed for expansion of communal representation in the Madras government. The next year he led a major anti-Hindi movement, tarring over the Hindi

names on Tamil Nadu's railway platforms. In 1953 he broke images of the god Vinayaka (Ganesh), to demonstrate his opposition to superstition.

Rajagopalachari again became Chief Minister of the state in 1952. Congress had won those elections, but its vote was far below expectations and the Communists had made major inroads on Congress strength. One of Rajaji's major concerns was education and in 1953 he devised a plan whereby children would attend school for three hours a day, spending the other half of the day learning the "traditional occupations" of their parents. The goal was to utilise classroom space more efficiently and also to link learning to labour in a Gandhian basic education manner. E.V.R. promptly dubbed the plan *Kula-Kalvi Thittam*—Caste-Based Education, and a massive campaign was waged against it. When the dust had settled, Rajaji had been forced into retirement, replaced by K. Kamaraj who had been President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee.[4]

Kamaraj, as has already been mentioned, was of the "low" toddy-tapping Nadar caste which was one of the most upwardly mobile in all of India.[5] It was noted earlier that many elite members of this caste had joined the Justice Party but Kamaraj, from a poor family and virtually uneducated, had been involved in the Congress from the time of the 1919 Amritsar massacre, when he was only sixteen years old. His dedication to the movement and to Gandhi was so great that he never married, saying he needed all his energies for the freedom struggle. Always, however, his roots remained deep in Tamil soil. He represented that side of the Tamil Nadu awakening symbolized by Tiru Vee Kaa, embodying Tamil regionalism and All-India nationalism. Unlike Kaliyansundarnar, however, he was no educated intellectual but a pragmatist with an intuitive sense of politics.

When the Nadar Kamaraj replaced Rajagopalachari as Chief Minister in 1954, E.V.R. promptly gave his support to Kamaraj, calling him a *pucca Tamilar*, a real Tamil. Kamaraj never verbally

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[4] For a fuller account of this episode see V. K. Narasimhan, *Kamaraj—A Study*, Bombay : Manaktala and Sons, 1967, pp. 40-8.

[5] See Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1969 for an excellent political study of this caste.

accepted this support but it was widely believed that he welcomed it and shared some of Periyar's antipathy to Brahmins. After all, he had helped to oust the Brahmin Rajagopalachari.[6] Bharati Dasan could sing :

> Oh Kamaraj, who has reached the hearts of Tamils. . . .
> The boldness shown by you in accepting the Ministership,
> Saving Tamil Nadu from suffering
> Inflicted by the colour-prejudiced leader (Rajaji),
> Will be remembered for many generations.[7]

The Congress became a very different organisation under Kamaraj, reflecting the regional renaissance although it retained its all-India concerns and connections.[8] The new regional emphasis was aided by All-India developments. In 1953 the Telugu-speaking area of the old Madras Presidency became a separate state. In 1956 there was a thorough-going States Reorganisation Act. Madras State's borders were smaller but it was no longer multi-lingual. E.V.R.'s cry for Dravidanad became a shout for an independent Tamil Nadu.

D.K. support aided the Kamaraj Congress. In highly politicised Tanjore District, for example, the D.K. supported the Communists in the 1952 elections, because of their "socialism and atheism." The Communists won six of the nineteen seats. By 1962, when the D.K. supported the Congress, the Communists couldn't win even one seat.[9] E.V.R.'s support to Kamaraj did not prevent him from continuing to lead agitations. In 1955 he burned the national flag as a token of his opposition to the central government and in 1957 he was sentenced to three years imprisonment for burning the Indian Constitution. But Kamaraj was careful to see that he was "imprisoned" in a hospital (and that for only six months)

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[6] Writing in the *Times of India* in 1955, an observer said, "Indeed, the Chief Minister, of Madras, Sri K. Kamaraj owes his return to the Assembly to the support of the Kazhagam in the election." Cited in M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India*, Bombay : Asia Publishers, 1962, p. 30.

[7] Bharati Dasan, trans. Sethumani Manian, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

[8] "The Congress in power in Madras was as much a Non-Brahmin party as was E.V.R.'s party . . . " Ka. Na. Subramanyam, 'DMK Contribution to Tamil Letters,' *Hindustan Standard Magazine*, Bombay, 23 January 1972. Even his Brahmin admirer, Narasimhan, wrote of "the virtual elimination of the older leaders in the districts" under Kamaraj. Narasimhan, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[9] A. Beteille, *Castes Old and New*, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-70.

rather than in a jail. In the 1960's Periyar burned pictures of the god Rama because he saw the *Ramayana* as the record of an imperialistic war by northerners against southerners.

Meanwhile, the D.M.K. was making significant gains on the political scene and in 1963 Kamaraj left the Chief Ministership to become president of the All India Congress Committee, where he was to play the major role in the naming of Lal Bahadur Sastri and, later, Indira Gandhi, as Prime Ministers of India. Bhaktavatsalam, Kamaraj's more orthodox successor, never had support from E.V.R. Partly because of the major anti-Hindi struggle of 1965, the D.M.K. won the 1967 elections, with even Kamaraj going down to defeat. Periyar was reconciled to the D.M.K. leader, Annadurai, by Annadurai's statement that "the entire D.M.K. Government was a gift to E.V.R."[10] Periyar returned the compliment by describing D.M.K. rule as "the start of a golden age for the Tamils."[11] Statues of E.V.R. were erected in several places in the state. They all had the same inscription :

> He who created God is a fool, he who propagates God is a scoundrel, and he who worships God is a barbarian.

Kamaraj died on Gandhi's birthday, October 2, 1975. A few months later a tall tablet with his figure engraved in its centre was erected in Salem next to a statue of Periyar. The Kamaraj tablet had an inscription affirming faith in God and in religion ![12]

In early 1971, just before the elections, E.V.R. embarrassed the D.M.K. Government by organizing in Salem an "Eradication of Superstition Conference" at which images of Rama were beaten and other Hindu deities were obscenely portrayed.[13] Under Karunanidhi's leadership, however, the D.M.K. won a sweeping victory. In 1972 the central government, which had been dependent on D.M.K. support in Parliament during the previous three years, presented E.V.R. wih a *Tamra Patra* for his role in the freedom struggle. The old man accepted it. At the very end of his life he organised a "Conference for the Eradication of Social Degradation of the Tamils."

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[10] *The Indian Express*, 23 December 1973.
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] *The Indian Express*, 16 July 1976.
[13] This incident will be more fully analysed in Chapter VI.

Periyar's main importance was that, more than any other figure, he articulated radical socialism, in the Bellah sense, to the Tamils in terms which they could understand. Bellah has written that in all traditional societies "there are disfavoured strata. . .with a traditional hostility toward the established authorities." While exploiting this "sacrilegious atheistic hostility. . . .anti religion functions as religion itself, a religion of millenial hopes."[14] Periyar was no intellectual dealing in abstractions, but a prophetic and spellbinding iconoclast, having something in common with the style of the *siddhars*. His message, however, was not that of the *jivan* or soul but rather of reason (*pakutharivu*) in a modern positivist sense. The sentiments evoked by this colourful language, imagery, and symbolism, and the loyalty he evoked from his followers did, however, make his anti-religious movement function as religion itself. While he was influenced by Marx and gave some support to the Communists in 1952, he was too rooted in Tamil Nadu to toss Marxist-Leninist slogans at the Tamil masses. The Marxists disowned him almost from the beginning and he had little to do with them. The roots of his radical socialism are partly Western and mostly his own.

For an American, seeing Periyar with his flowing white beard and piercing eyes, John Brown—minus the Bible—comes to mind. The international person he is most compared to in Tamil Nadu, however, is a more obscure American, Robert (Bob) Green Ingersoll. One can buy copies of this nineteenth century American positivist's works, in Tamil or English, in almost any bookstore in Tamil Nadu. This is due to his being popularised by the D.K., although Periyar denied any direct influence. 'My disciples read Ingersoll to me, but my ideas are my own.'[15] The following is a representative quotation from Ingersoll :

> This in my judgment is real religion. To do all the good you can is to be a saint in the highest and noblest sense . . . To relieve suffering, to put the star of hope in the midnight of despair, this is true holiness. This is the religion of science . . . Being satisfied that the supernatural does not exist, man should turn his entire attention to the affairs of this world, to the facts of nature . . . Man will be civilized when pas-

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[14] Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-2.
[15] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, Interview, Trichinopoly, March 10, 1972.

> sions are dominated by the intellect, when reason occupies the throne. We are growing grander and nobler . . . There is no darkness but ignorance.[16]

This passage perfectly portrays the world view and ethos of the Western part of Periyar's message. The words, which evoked passion on the populist plains of the American Midwest, swept across the lush Cauvery delta with the same power in this century.

Yet, as was said above, Periyar had his own imagery and idiom, which related his message to his Tamil listeners. The way socialism, atheism, and anti-Brahminism were joined together by him can be seen in a typical quotation from a speech given in 1934 :

> Socialism means justice without bias and equality without differences. But there are inequalities in every aspect of the present life, in caste, in education, in wealth, and in social status. Even after their hard work the people suffer without scraps to eat, rags to wear, and huts to live in . . . When we say it is not proper and the prosperity should be equally enjoyed by all, the capitalists, the aristocrats, the landlords . . . cry aloud. The priests and the theists stand up and shout that it is against the will of God . . . (They say) a man leads a happy or a sorrowful life according to the results of his *karmas* done in a previous birth . . .[17]

Periyar often reiterated that no Brahmin can be for equality and justice. Part of the statement he submitted to the court in 1957, when he was arrested, is representative :

> Anyone who calls himself a Brahmin in this country cannot behave differently from his position . . . that separates and elevates him from the rest of society . . . According to the *Vedas*, *Sastras*, *Puranas* and *Ithihasas*, Brahmins are the upper caste and others . . . are the low caste. The *Sastras* of Hinduism . . . attribute inferiority and superiority, disgrace and honour, to the low and upper castes respectively. No Brahmins can . . . give up this.[18]

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[16] Robert G. Ingersoll, *The Liberty of Man*, London : Watts, 1941, pp. 51 and 75-6.

[17] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, speech given at Tiruppur in 1934. Cited in *Viduthalai*, 2 March 1964.

[18] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, speech, 1957. Quoted in *Viduthalai*, 20 March 1964.

The message is underlined and is tied to an " atheistic hostility " in another typical quotation :

> People say our revolutionary movement has spoiled its chances because it entered into the field of God and religion. Man is disgraced by caste and caste is disgraced by religion. How can we destroy one, keeping the other alive ? . . . Can the Hindu religion stand if caste is abolished ? . . . Can God exist when cast and religion are abolished ? . . . I shall give you an illustration . . . All the *Sastras* of Hinduism . . . accept the division of the four *varnas*. The words of " God " which appear in the *Bhagavad Gita* approve of this : " I created the four *varnas*. I created the *dharmas* (duties) to be carried out by the respective castes. If anyone does not follow his duty, I will put him in hell." Lord Krishna, the philosophical God of the Hindus, has uttered these words . . . Can those who believe that Krishna is a God or that the *Gita* is his prophecy eradicate caste ? . . . So keep in your minds that there is no other way except to become atheists in some way or other . . . [19]

Naicker's anti-Brahminism was based not only on a hatred of caste, however. It also fed on, and fostered, the primordial sentiment of race. North Indians as well as Brahmins were seen as Aryans and they were viewed as being responsible for Hinduism, caste, and the degradation of the Dravidians. Just as he continually attacked the *Gita*, so the *Ramayana* served as a special target. Naicker was especially bitter about this epic because he felt, as had Sundaram Pillai much earlier, that it depicted Rama, a Northerner, warring against the Dravidian Ravana in Lanka, which he identified as South India :

> The *Ramayana* is not based on any historical truth . . . According to it Rama was not a Tamilian . . . He was a Northerner. Ravana, who was killed by him, was the king of Lanka (that is southern Tamil Nadu) . . . The men of Tamil Nadu are derided as monkeys and monsters . . . In the *Ramayana* war not a single Northerner or Aryan lost his

[19] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, speech, 1934. Quoted in *Viduthalai*, 6 April 1964.

> life . . . All those who lost their lives were only Tamils who were called *Rakshashas* . . .[20]

Politically, this anti-Aryanism has led, as has been pointed out, to the demand for Dravidanad. The identification of Tamil Brahmins as Aryans has fostered a corroding hostility against them and has helped make a political and cultural struggle into a racial one. The leading D.K. newspaper has said, " There has been no political struggle . . . in this country. The racial struggle between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins has been the politics here."[21]

Our major concern however, is to focus on E.V.R.'s effect on Hinduism in particular and on religion in general. Was there a crisis which forced him to forge an identity and so formulate his radical socialist message ? I knew of his *sannyasin*-like journey North and about his disagreements with Gandhi in the Gurukulum, affair but in a final interview I probed more deeply and was rewarded.[22] I remember being met at the door of the far from ostentatious home by his gracious (and controversial) wife, being led to a verandah where the old and ailing Periyar reclined on a cot surrounded by three or four small and friendly dogs. As usual, Periyar was in black shirt and *veshti* and his white beard, although long, was neat. He insisted on sitting up and pouring us coffee with his own only slightly-trembling hands. Once we started, he talked animatedly, and with almost total recall, for over an hour.

He was relatively uninterested in discussing the Gurukulum affair, even though much has been made of it as a turning point in his life. He said it was only a difference of opinion. It was the Vaikom incident of 1924 that really excited him. All I had to do was mention the word " Vaikom " and he was calling for paper, borrowing my pen, and drawing us a sketch of the temple with its four gates and four streets surrounding them. As I have already mentioned, the *Harijans* were not allowed to enter the temple or go on the streets of that West Coast town. The follow-

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[20] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, *The Ramayana : A True Reading*, Madras : Dravidian Press, 1959, p. iii.

[21] *Viduthalai*, 29 February 1964.

[22] The interview was held on March 10, 1972, in his home in Trichinopoly. Ms. Anita Diehl and Dr. Sagurdass, Principal of Bishop Heber College in Trichinopoly, were extremely helpful in arranging the interview, which they also attended and participated in. Ms. Diehl has done her own study of Periyar.

ing is a digest of Periyar's account and, whether he was completely accurate or not, it represents his impressions almost fifty years after the event and was a milestone on his own road to identity.

The struggle began with a lawyer, T. K. Mahadevan, editor of the newspaper *Deshabhimani*, who was a low caste Ezhavar. He found it difficult to get to his office because of the ban against walking on the streets. So he organized an agitation. One of the leaders was George Joseph, a Christian Congressman from Tamil Nadu. Periyar became involved because of his presidency of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. The Raja of Travencore welcomed him when he first arrived on April 13, 1924. But after he organised a few meetings, he was thrown into jail for a month. The temple was closed by the Rajah. After Periyar's release he was asked to return to Tamil Nadu but he refused to go. Many women were involved in the struggle, including Periyar's wife. Some of the upper caste men went naked in front of them to shame them. Meanwhile Gandhi had been consulted by Rajagopalachari and other Southern Congress leaders. Gandhi was upset that some Christians and Sikhs were involved since he felt this was a purely Hindu affair.

A huge religious ceremony was held by the Rajah to destroy Periyar and his following but the Rajah soon died instead. The Ranis felt this was E.V.R.'s doing and they were frightened so they released him after only four months imprisonment. Section 144 was promulgated, prohibiting gatherings of more than five people. The Brahmin Dewan of the state wrote to Gandhi informing him of his willingness to open the roads and asking for advice. Gandhi wrote to E.V.R. suggesting he return to Tamil Nadu. Gandhi came, met the Ranis, and an agreement was worked out whereby the streets were opened but not the temple. Periyar accepted this for awhile but after three months he felt the temple should be opened also.

Stimulated by all this, a group of Malayalee non-Brahmins organised a big 'Change Religion' conference at Ernakulam.[23] They felt if the outcastes changed their religion they would not be discriminated against. Periyar suggested they switch to Islam,

[23] I have not been able to find any more information about this conference.

although he said any religion except Hinduism was all right. Some Christians suggested Christianity. About a hundred young men became Muslims and a group of older people became Christians.

In the town of Aleppey certain streets around the temple were also closed to outcastes. The young men who had become Muslims went on the forbidden streets. They were attacked and two were killed. At that point Periyar realised that no religious change could solve the outcaste problem. From that time on he has been opposed to all religion and not just to caste Hinduism.

He has a warm spot for the Buddha, however. His interest in B. R. Ambedkar was mentioned earlier. When that outcaste leader converted to Buddhism, E.V.R. did not lose his interest. Often D.K. followers have pictures of the Buddha on their walls. An amusing story is told about the earlier days of Naicker. In Hindu society, as in most others, naming of children is a religious ceremony. These names are often of Sanskritic origin. At the time of the freedom struggle some Tamil parents gave their children the names of North Indian freedom fighters. With the advent of the Self Respect Movement, names of Tamil origin began to favoured. Political or social reformers took the place of religious leaders at the naming ceremony. Periyar was active in this and often gave a child the names Gautama or Siddhartha, after the Buddha. The custom of presenting some money to the person who gives the name grew and after Kamaraj replaced Rajagopalachari as Chief Minister, E.V.R. often gave children the name of Kamaraj. He charged one rupee for "Siddhartha" or "Gautama" and two rupees for "Kamaraj"!

I asked E.V.R. why he was so friendly to Buddha. He replied that the Buddha advocated reason. "Even the word 'buddha' means reason and sense." But Buddhism became a religion and so he is not a Buddhist. "Buddha is different from Buddhism."[24] We also asked him about Christ and Christianity. He retorted,

> Why accept Christ's miracles and no others? Can you as Christians accept that squirrels built a bridge as we read in the *Ramayana*? You accept miracles in your own religion but not in others. Ingersoll was right. No religion can

[24] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, interview, *op. cit.*

> exist with reason. All religion is irrational. If you are religious it means you must be superstitious.

We then asked him, 'But what about Christ as a man?' He quickly replied, 'The Bible says Christ is not only a man. Why should any man need a Mohammad or a Christ?"[25]

Incidentally, at this interview I reminded him of an earlier meeting when I had talked to him in Madurai. At that time, I had tried to tease him by telling him that while he argued for reason and Western progress, American college students were becoming Zen Buddhists and carrying copies of the *Bhagavad Gita* around with them. Not at all fazed, he had responded "Young man, there are fools in every country." After being, reminded of this, he smiled and said, "Fools belong especially to India."[26]

There are innumerable quotations from E.V.R. about God and religion which reflect the themes of the interview. Often he does not directly attack the concept of God. The following quotation is representative :

> The less I say of god the better it would be. Talk on god may be likened to a dripping bucket which is full when it leaves the water's surface but arrives empty at the top of the well. It is a matter for empty discussion and not for substantial results. However, the best of prophets have said that god is something that cannot be seen or touched and is beyond human knowledge, and finally that it is something that exists only when believed in. There is really not much to argue about in such a definition of god.[27]

There can be no doubt about his hatred of religion, however. The experience he narrated in the interview is clearly reflected in such comments as the following :

> The real fact is that all those who lose faith in Brahmin priest. the *Vedas*, *Sastras*, *Itihasas*, and *Puranas* are called atheists, If the superstition and exploitation of the priests cannot be

[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, *Social Reform or Social Revolution?* trans. A. M. Dharmalingam, Madras : Viduthalai Publication, 1965, p. 8.

> destroyed without one becoming an atheist, well there is nothing wrong in becoming an atheist . . . It must . . . be remembered that the people who oppose one religion for another, put faith in one prophet as against another, and in consequence invite people to join their narrow fold, are all equally opposed to reform and enlightenment . . . All religionists sail in the same sinister boat. A change of religion is no solution to man's ills. No religion is the solution.[28]

The slight ambiguity which resulted from Periyar's separation of God and religion was clarified for me in an editorial he wrote for *Viduthalai* in 1971 :

> Traditionally, nations which were ruled by kings had religion . . . as governing principles. For a modern nation, ruled by the people, the governing principles must be intelligence and freedom . . . The person who invented God can be forgiven because he was a fool and did it out of ignorance . . . He assumed there must be a cause for the creation and said that cause was God . . . But religion and scripture are not like that. The inventors of those have invented absolute falsehood ; they have classified and organised religion only in order to cheat and threaten people . . .[29]

Srinivas, Singer, and Agehananda Bharati seem to be correct in labelling the Dravida Kazhagam and atheistic movement. Periyar's break with tradition, in substance if not in style, is fairly complete. Even E.V.R., however, found it necessary to occasionally establish continuities with tradition as he forged his own identity and profoundly affected Tamil Nadu's. Even E.V.R. at times, fell under the sway of the primordial sentiment of language.

This was true despite his widely-publicised criticism of Tamil. For all his flamboyance, he had a deep awareness of history. Writing in *Viduthalai*, he said, "There is no literature of the Tamils unadulterated by the Aryans."[30] In one of my interviews with him, he freely acknowledged that some Sanskrit influence can be

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[28] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[29] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, "Editorial," *Viduthalai*, 26 August 1971.
[30] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, "The Reason for the Degradation of the Tamils," *Viduthalai*, 8 March 1964.

found in even the earliest Tamil works.[31] His opponents often cite a remark he made about Tamil being a "barbaric" language. In my final interview with him, I asked about this. He replied that by "barbaric" he meant "primitive" and any old language is primitive. "There are no words in Tamil for rational ideas and scientific inventions. Moreover, it has problems with social terms. There are no respectable words for women—no plural forms for feminine words. Tamil even lacks of proper word for 'marriage.'"[32] He stressed in that interview that Tamils must be freed from venerating their language so that they can develop it, "and create a new scientific basis for our society."[33]

Despite these outspoken views on Tamil one can find in his speeches a pride in the Tamil literary past and that pride was related to his world view and ethos. Tiruvalluvar, author of the *Kural*, has his admiration :

> After the Buddha, the great Tiruvalluvar was born in India . . . He preached what Buddha had taught. His inestimable *Tirukkural* was thrown into the waste paper basket to shamelessly hug the *Gita* and Manu's code.[34]

He also said :

> The doctrine of many castes and many gods is foreign to our race. Our ancestors have not spoken of them in their works . . . My dear Dravidian people . . .all we preach are found in the ethical works of our ancestors. In the Tirukkural, the best of these ethical works, the great characteristics of the Dravidians are found . . . We came to our deplorable state because we forgot the *Kural* . . . The Aryans speak of "superior" and "inferior" status in their works. But we cannot find such distinctions in Valluvar's book. He says that all men are equal by birth . . . He does not ask the people to worship stones in order to go to heaven. He insists on a disciplined life for men on earth.[35]

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[31] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, interview, Madurai, January 7, 1964.
[32] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, interview, March 10, 1972.
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, *Social Reform or Social Revolution? op. cit.*, p. 26.
[35] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, "Social Reform is Our Primary Duty," speech quoted in *Viduthalai*, 15 March 1964.

Thus, Naicker held up a system of ethics which blended a "scientific" socialism with a nontheistic interpretation of the venerable *Kural*. Even he found it necessary, at times, to balance, "identity and openness," "memory and receptivity" and his anti-religion began to "function to some extent as religion itself." It may be significant that the last quotation was delivered in 1949, the same year that the D.M.K. broke away from E.V.R. As shall be demonstrated, they were to carry their nostalgia for the times of the Tamil classics much further than Periyar ever did.

The tincture of romantic nationalism that E.V.R. brought to his message of radical socialism gave that socialism much of its appeal. The radical socialism of an orthodox Marxism has also been present in Tamil Nadu and in the neighbouring state of Kerala it has had some striking success—once coming to power in a democratic election and, at the present time, being the second strongest party in that state. Periyar, as was stated, was impressed by the Marxism he saw in the Soviet Union in 1931 and he gave support to some Tamil Marxists in the 1952 elections. A brief examination of Periyar's message and that of the Marxist socialists can be an aid in understanding how the message of radical socialism reasonates more when it relates itself to a specific context and to primordial sentiments and romantic nationalism.

The classic criticism the Marxists gave of Periyar is stated in an article in *The Radical Review*, a journal of the Saturday Evening Club which was closely related to the Madras branch of the Communist Party (Marxist), the so-called C.P.M. or "Left" Communists of India. There has been very little dialogue between the D.K. and C.P.M., and the Communists have not devoted much scholarly study to E.V.R. The article mentioned above, written by a pseudonymous author, commented on this lack :

> What is . . . surprising is that there has been no conscious attempt in radical circles and by the left wing parties to seriously evaluate the social factors that gave rise to Periyar . . . , to study the content of his policies, and analyze his impact on Tamil politics . . . There can be no real justification for ignoring Periyar.[36]

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[36] Arulalan, "The Relevance of Periyar," *The Radical Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2, May, 1971, p. 15.

Quoting liberally from Marx and Lenin, the author argued that Periyar should have stressed class not caste :

> He failed to see the connection between religion and a class society. In the tradition of Western rationalists he pitted his idea of . . . the rationalist path against the idea of God, both of them abstractions . . . Casteism survives because it is the handmaiden of class rule. Along with God and religion, caste is another powerful tool to divide the masses and divert their attention from economic facts of life . . . Periyar failed to realize that the road to a casteless society is the same as the road to a classless society.[37]

This obviously sensitive, but orthodox, Marxist summed up his argument by saying, " If only Periyar would substitute ' bourgeois ' for ' Brahmin ' ! "[38]

The counter argument to this Marxist view was articulated by several speakers at a meeting I attended in the industrial city of Coimbatore. One of the most important developments in Tamil Nadu is the enormous increase of voluntary political and cultural associations. No groups have been more influential in stimulating this activity than the D.K. and D.M.K. This particular meeting was a joint one. The two groups were the " Forum of Thought," headed by a high school teacher, and the Coimbatore " Rationalist Forum " (*Pakutharivu Pasarai*). These forums were in every district of the state and acted as the cutting edge of the Dravida Kazhagam. Its local president was a lawyer. The groups had combined in order to produce a journal of poetry called *Vanambadi* (" Skylark ").

To attend such a meeting is to experience an ethos far different from the Saturday Evening Club of the bright Brahmin Marxists of Madras. In Coimbatore the meeting was held in a tutorial college, one of those dismal diploma mills which relentlessly beat facts into students' minds to enable them to pass the university examinations. Hard-backed chairs were lined up formally, as though we were in a class as well as a classroom, and a certain formal style was maintained. Beneath the formality, however,

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

there was warm cordiality, a great deal of openness, and some genuine and passionate conviction. About twenty men were present, mostly aged between twenty-five and fifty. In the predominantly lower middle class group, there were several Harijans.

The president of the "Forum of Thought" best articulated the D.K. disagreement with the Communists :

> It is unfortunate that Communists believe Indian social problems can be solved by economic means. Indian society is a caste society and class conflicts are only secondary. The caste structure is forming a super layer over the new class structure. For example, in the newly established industrial colonies, the scavenge settlements are constructed separately from the rest. So the old caste society is being imposed on an industrial society. The class-minded trade unions, mostly led by Communists, do not see this problem because their leadership is dominated by high caste people.[39]

Other criticisms given by various members included the following : The Communists accept Hindi as the official language of India whereas the Dravidian movement wanted to save Tamil by opposing Hindi ; the Dravidian movement has attacked superstitions and such customs as no remarriage for widows while Communists remain silent on these social issues ; the Dravidian movement considers the outcastes to be the real proletarians while the Communists consider industrial labourers, who are mostly high or middle caste, to be the proletariat ; Communists rarely spell out that they are atheists—in fact, most of the cadres of the Communists believe in a god and practice Hindu rituals. This latter comment demonstrated how, for the D.K., religion is a major cause of social and economic evils. A Harijan, then teaching at the Coimbatore Agricultural Institute, summed up the D.K. view of the Marxists :

> The Communists are the handmaids of Vedic society within which they aim for a Communist order. The Dravidian movement wants to replace the Vedic Brahmanic society by a new society based on scientific, rational, egalitarian

[39] Meeting of the Rationalist Forum and Forum of Thought, Coimbatore, April 1972.

> principles. The Dravidian movement is a precursor to a truly socialist society.[40]

At that meeting a few pro-Communist voices were raised suggesting that the D.K. and the Communists should join together. Such a merger could prove powerful in the future for then the C.P.M. would have the benefit of the disciplined D.K. cadres joined to its own and, for greater importance, Tamil Communism might add the necessary cultural dimension to its orthodox economic determinism. The young Marxist who wrote in *The Radical Review* may be a precursor to such a development, but it's doubtful. In any event, he saw the important contribution Periyar and the D.K. have made to Tamil Nadu's evolving identity :

> A man has first of all to assert to himself his human worth before he could look the oppressor in the face and say "No." This is the case of the American Negro ; this is the need of the Indian Harijan. That Periyar sought to give such identity to the lower caste Hindu is a social fact which appears to have escaped the serious attention of the Marxists of Tamil Nadu.[41]

Yet even this intelligent observer decries the cultural dimension which made Periyar's message so appealing :

> The relevance of Periyar lies in the fact that the oppressed were made aware of their down-troddenness and came to realize that this degradation is manmade and hence alterable through struggle ; his tragedy lies in the fact that he did not realise that the struggle has to be on the economic plane.[42]

Periyar's ability to awaken the masses seems beyond dispute. My own experience in Tamil Nadu is filled with bizarre incidents evolving from the impact of Periyar's views on popular religious attitudes. Talking to a lower class shop worker one night, I was amazed to hear him mention the name of Martin Luther. When I asked him how he knew of him, the answer was prompt : " Our party leaders told us in a speech how Luther broke the power of the priests in Europe." And at a traditional Tamil festival where

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[40] *Ibid.*
[41] Arulalan, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

worshippers of the smallpox goddess Mariamman walked on a pit full of burning coals to escape the goddess' wrath, D.K. men carrying black flags walked on the fire also, shouting, " There is no God," much to the disruption of the villagers' simple faith.

Conversational tid-bits gained from the impact of this movement have been fascinating. A wealthy *zamindar* of the old order a man who gives a good deal of money to the temples, once surprised me by saying, " You know, there's a great deal of the D.K. in all of us. After all, why should only the Brahmins have certain, religious privileges ? " A fairly wealthy merchant told me Luther was a greater man than Christ because Luther campaigned against religion. When I asked him if he were a Hindu, a Nadar member of the upper middle class replied,

> You can say I am one or not. Gods are poetic symbols of ideas. Murugan, sitting on the mountain with his spear and peacock is the symbol of nature. Brahma symbolizes creation, Siva destruction, and Vishnu preservation. But the Brahmin priests and other religious leaders get rid of the poetry. There are virtually no temples to Brahma in India. Why ? Because Brahma is the symbol of creativity, of art. The Brahmins and other religious leaders want no creativity. Creativity is a threat to them. They want unquestioning acceptance of the structure. Creation means birth but for Brahminical Hinduism bliss is *not* to be reborn. They don't want creativity or birth or new ideas.

A year and a half after Periyar's death, Mrs. Gandhi declared the " Emergency " in India. On the last day of January, 1976, the D.M.K. Tamil Nadu Government was dismissed by the Centre. During the final thirteen months of the Emergency in the state, no group was more persecuted than the D.K. cadres. One high school teacher's experience was typical. He was stripped naked and thrown into a cold cell (in the hill station of Ootacamund in February) whose floor had been covered with icy water. Periodically he was beaten with steel tipped batons by policemen. What they wanted was not a political statement but a confession of faith in " God ! "

When I had my final interview with E.V.R., he said his next move was to have a conference of his followers where they would

choose one of three alternatives for their next mass action. The alternatives were : (1) to agitate for secession from India and the establishment of Dravidanad ; (2) to start a movement which would allow any Hindu to perform *puja* in the temples ; (3) to boycott all temples.[43] He told me he had to be careful because he did not want to destroy the D.M.K. government which was in power but " even the present government can't keep up with my radicialism."[44]

The very next month he prophetically wrote in an " Appeal " :

> In politics our country is under the dictatorial sway of people who are bound to the ideas and culture of the primitive times, thousands of miles away . . . We, in our state, are now in the seat of power. But we can be chucked away from this . . . position at any movement without any reason being assigned for it.[45]

He went on to say that they cannot wage war against " this enslavement by alien rule " because that could cause the Centre to move against the D. M.K. government.

> Can't we be unbothered about being relieved of power? No, that can't be since the usurper will be a Brahmin (Mrs. Gandhi) . . . If I start any political agitation even " our " men like Kamaraj . . . will be our opponents.[46]

In this appeal he declared that, in light of the situation, he would start a social rather than a political agitation. He suggested the second of the alternatives he had mentioned the previous month to me ; he would demand that all worshippers be given " the right to touch the idol of god and the right to offer *puja*."[47]

Two items of importance stand out from this final " Appeal " of his life. First, his antagonism to Mrs. Gandhi. This enmity was not only because she was head of the " alien " central government but also because she was a Brahmin. Secondly, for politically pragmatic reasons, the agitation he suggested was aimed

[43] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, interview, March 10, 1972.
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, " My Appeal," in *The Modern Rationalist*, Vol. I, No. 8, April, 1972, p. 1.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 2.
[47] *Ibid.*

more at reforming Hinduism than of abolishing it. Periyar's atheistic convictions are not in doubt, but the results of his movement have been more in the direction of religious reform than in that of abolition. Srinivas, Singer, and Agehananda Bharati are as unaware of this as are Periyar's devoted followers or the Marxists of Tamil Nadu.

CHAPTER V

C. N. ANNADURAI : HERO OF ROMANTIC NATIONALISM

On the famous Madras Marina a modernistic monument points a slim spire to the sky. This is the Anna *Samadhi*, marking the grave of Tamil Nadu's former Chief Minister, Conjeevaram Natarajan Annadurai, known to all Tamils as C.N.A. or Anna (Elder Brother). Situated on eight acres of formerly barren sand that has laboriously been forced to grow grass and shrubbery, the *samadhi* is a soaring and solid symbol of Annadurai. Its pillar points to dignity, its outstretched arm topped with a lotus fountain signifies duty, and the ring of marble on which pillar and arm stand represents the unity which comes from discipline. *Kanyam*, *Kadamai*, and *Katapadu*—" Dignity, Duty and Discipline "—this is the slogan Anna gave to his Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.). As the monument is a metaphor for the man and for the movement, so the man is a symbol of the sentiments which he, more than any other figure, articulated and crystallized. If he "did not wholly make the history" of his time, he "surely embodied it," to use Geertz's language.

Although of a younger generation than the other outstanding Tamil leaders of the early Independence period, Anna was the first to die. Rajagopalachari died in 1972, Periyar in 1973, and Kamaraj on Gandhi's birthday, 1975. Annadurai was struck down by throat cancer at 12 : 22 in the morning on February 2, 1969. He had served just under two years as the first D.M.K. Chief Minister of a Madras which he was responsible for renaming Tamil Nadu. The funeral was the largest Tamil Nadu has ever known. An estimated three million people viewed it.[1] Twenty-eight mourners, riding on the roof of a packed train coming from the southern city of Madurai, were killed when they were swept from the train roof by the iron girders of a bridge. Anna's body

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[1] Details of the funeral are drawn from *The Indian Express*, 5 February 1969.

was covered both by the national tricolour and by the red and black D.M.K. flag. Members of the armed forces—symbol of India's federal structure—led the procession and in an automobile just behind rode the Governor of the state, symbol of Central authority. The former Congress Chief Minister, M. Bhaktavatsalam, rode beside the Governor. A contingent of D.M.K. workers followed, carrying a giant party flag. The actual service was extremely brief. Anna was buried, as are most Dravidian leaders. They see burial as a symbol of anti-Aryanism, related to ancient Tamil practices as demonstrated by the sites at Adichannalur. Anna's body was smeared with sandal paste and his adopted elder son put a bit of rice in his mouth in an age-old, but Hindu, tradition.

This paradoxical mixture of symbols catches some of the ethos and world view of this charismatic man. There is no greater embodiment of Tamil primordial sentiments than he, but he also represented a "civilizing" of these sentiments, accommodating them to the civil politics of India, and, to a lesser degree, to the Sanskritising process of Hinduism. In so doing, he articulated a regional Hinduism more than a new religion or an atheistic stance. He struck a chord which resonated in the Tamil consciousness. In so doing, he became Tamil Nadu's most beloved twentieth century figure. Periyar was the spearhead of radical socialism in Tamil Nadu, linking it to the primordial sentiment of race. Annadurai accepted Periyar's racial categories and his populist brand of socialism, but, to a much greater degree than his mentor, he tied his movement to the linguistic renaissance and to Tamil culture. He articulated this powerful combination of radical socialism and romantic nationalism in a unique and compelling way. To continue with Bellah's terminology, Annadurai infused the potentially disruptive mixture with a large dose of liberalism. In so doing, he provided a framework of meaning for large numbers of Tamils.

His life was so full that only the biographical highlights can be presented here.[2] He was born on September 15, 1909 of middle caste and lower middle class Mudaliar weaver parents in the

[2] See Sagar Ahluwalia, *Anna—The Tempest and the Sea*, New Delhi : Young Asia Publications, 1969, A. P. Janarthanam, *Anna, A Sketch*, Madras : Manonmoney Puthaga Nilayam, 1968, and T. C. Sivaswamy, *Anna, Leader of the South*, Madras : Poompuhar Publications, 1968.

ancient temple city of Conjeevaram (Kancheepuram). His father, Natarajan, and mother, Bangaru Ammaiyar, did not raise him; that was done by his beloved aunt, Rajamani Ammal. She was a relatively orthodox Hindu and Annadurai grew up in far from heretical surroundings. Later accounts say he went to the temples for worship but disliked the noise and the crowds.[3] After getting through high school (with difficulties in mathematics) he went to Pachaiyappa's College in Madras. This is one of the oldest colleges in Tamil Nadu and was founded by a non-Brahmin philanthropist. He passed his Intermediate examination with a first class and gained an M.A. in History, Economics, and Politics in 1934. In 1932 he had won the prestigious Sir A. Seshayya Shastri Essay competition. Later he received a degree in law from the Madras Law College. While still a student he got married in the orthodox fashion to an uneducated girl, Rani Ammal. They never had any children but he adopted the four sons of his sister.

Many myths have arisen about the amount and quality of his reading but most accounts agree on the basics. Rousseau Voltaire, Shelley, Marx, Lenin, Tolstoy, Luther, and Socrates appear on every list and, if the accounts are not accurate, they give an idea of the influences he was later to claim. The lists also include Ingersoll, Charles Bradlaugh, George Bernard Shaw, and Bertrand Russell and he often quoted from all four. What made him unique for his times, however, was that he read so much Tamil. Young "double degree" Madrasis usually stuck to English. But he read the Hindu epics in Tamil, the *Siddhars*, works on the Buddha, and most of the Tamil classics. He also gained an early love of Ramalingaswamy and of Bharati Dasan.[4]

While in Law College he had to stop studying for a brief period because of lack of funds. At that time the Justice Party was still very active in Madras. Anna worked for the party as a translator from English into Tamil. Many of the older leaders were much better in the former than in the latter. In 1936 he was the Justice Party candidate in the Madras Corporation elections for the Pethunaickenpe Division. The story is told (again it may be apocryphal) that Annadurai challenged his Congress rival,

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[3] A. Mariamalaiyan, *Perarignar Annavin Peruvazhvu*, Madras : n.d., pp. 34-6.

[4] A. S. Venu, *Life of Annadurai*, Madras : Kalai Manram, 1953, pp. 16-17.

Sreenivasa Rao—a Brahmin—to take a meal in a Harijan home. Mr. Rao finally did eat some vegetarian food with some outcastes.[5] In any event, in these days when Congress was popular in Madras, Annadurai lost the election. He became active in organising labour unions and edited a labour weekly called *Nava Yugam*.

His life's most portentous moment came in 1937 when he met E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker at the Sengunthar Youth Conference in Tirupur. He was soon asked by Periyar to come to Erode to hlep edit the newspapers *Kudi Arasu* and *Viduthalai*. By now the Justice Party was slipping badly. In 1937 the Congress agreed to take power with Rajagopalachari as the Chief Minister. Soon after came Rajaji's abortive attempt to introduce Hindi as a compulsory subject in the presidency. Periyar started his famous anti-Hindi agitation and was soon in prison. Annadurai, a leading agitator, was sent to jail for four months. While still in jail, Naicker was named head of the Justice Party. Annadurai became his disciple and a leading organizer. When the Congress Ministry resigned as part of Gandhi's opposition to Britain's taking India into World War II, the Justice Party was asked by the British to form a new government. Annadurai led the battle against this, and while many old leaders disapproved, Periyar agreed with Anna. In 1941, Anna accompanied Periyar on his Northern tour, translating for him in his meetings with Ambedkar and Jinnah. Annadurai was later to comment humorously on how he and Periyar, the latter with saffron shawl and flowing beard, was often taken in the North for a holy man and his disciple.[6] In 1942 Anna founded the Tamil weekly *Dravida Nadu* whose style and content made a powerful appeal to educated Tamil youth. During his lifetime, Anna was to become editor or founder of many Tamil and English journals and newspapers, including *Kanchi*, *Nam Nadu*, *Homeland*, and *Home Rule*.

It was the 1944 Justice meeting in Salem that saw Anna emerge as a leading member of the D.K. That was the conference where the Justice Party was transformed into the mass-based Dravida Kazhagam. Annadurai not only suggested the name change but also presented a resolution calling for the renunciation of all

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[5] A. Maraimalaiyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-6.
[6] A. P. Janarthanam, *Anna : A Sketch*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

British titles by party members and of the abandoning of caste suffixes after names. Much of the older Justice leadership opposed him, but Periyar was for the changes and they were adopted. Over fifty thousand new members joined the D.K. after Salem.[7]

With the advent of Independence in 1947, Periyar urged that August 15 be observed as a " Day of Mourning," not because the British had left but because the Dravidanad demand had not been granted. Annadurai, in a *Dravida Nadu* editorial, publicly disagreed. He continued to support the demand for a separate homeland, but felt the departure of British imperialism should be celebrated. The split between disciple and master had begun. The next year Anna presided over the Erode Anti-Hindi Conference where he made a good impression on such pan-Indian Tamil regionalists as Tiru Vee Kaa. By this time, Annadurai was General Secretary to the D.K. and Naicker called him his adopted son. In 1949, however, the growing disagreement between Anna's " Young Turks " and the old leader came to a head. Periyar's second marriage brought about a formal division.

On Septmber 17, 1949, amidst a propitious rainstorm, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Progressive Dravidian Federation) was launched at Robinson Park in Madras. It kept the red and black colours of the D.K., but its new flag had those colours arranged in two broad horizontal stripes. The very next day Anna and E.V.R were sentenced to fines of seven hundred rupees each or six months in jail for " anti-Aryan " writings. In Anna's case it was for *Arya Maayi*, his most virulant work. Both men chose to be imprisoned and both were sent to the same jail. Their common incarceration did not bring them back together, however, although there was some cooperation. At the 1951 conference of the D.M.K., it was decided to support any candidates who supported the demand for Dravidanad. The D.M.K. ran no candidates of its own. When E.V.R. started his campaign to tar over Hindi names on railway station name-boards, Anna joined and tarred the board in Periyar's hometown of Erode. By 1953 the party had a paid membership of over one hundred thousand.[8]

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[7] A. S. Venu, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Rajagopalachari's ill-fated education plan was offered at this time and the D.M.K., along with the D.K. and many other Tamils, were active in the protest which eventually led not only to a defeat of the plan but to the "retirement" of Rajaji and to the installation of the non-Brahmin Kamaraj as Chief Minister. Annadurai and many of his followers were jailed for a three month period during these disturbances. After Kamaraj became Chief Minister, E.V.R supported the Congress. A Tamil town, Kallakudi, had become the site of a major industrial undertaking by the North Indian capitalist, Dalmia. The town was renamed Dalmiapuram. The D.M.K. demanded the new name be given up—seeing in the demand a perfect conjoining of their radical socialism and romantic nationalism. On July 15, 1953, D.M.K. volunteers, led by the young M. Karunanidhi, stopped trains by lying on the tracks, tactics learned from Gandhi's freedom struggle. There was police firing, two volunteers lost their lives, and the D.M.K. had its first martyrs.

The second provincial conference of the D.M.K. was held in Trichinopoly in 1956. There the party made the momentous decision to contest the 1957 elections. The next fourteen years were to be the golden years of the D.M.K. For almost all of that period, until 1969, Annadurai was the party's central figure, although he had a loyal and talented band of *Thambis* (little brothers).

Using Anna as the key personality, we shall concentrate on the primordial sentiments of race and language and demonstrate how they interacted with, and affected, the religious culture of Tamil Nadu. As a rather arbitrary heuristic device, the discussion will be divided into dimensions called the political, the social, the cultural, and the religious.

Politically, the D.M.K. has had the most spectacular career of any non-Congress party in India. It is surprising that so few people took it seriously until its victory in 1967. Many observers assumed that the "Tamilisation" of the Congress Party under K. Kamaraj would decimate D.M.K. ranks. Thus a "knowledgeable" survey of the Indian politial scene, written just before the 1962 elections, had this to say :

> The D.M.K. wants to be popular in all of the Southern states but it has no strength in any state other than

> Madras. Even in that state its strength is gradually dwindling because of the changing character of the local Congress party which is reflecting the change of social patterns of that state.[9]

The results belied the forecast. In the 1957 elections, the Congress got 45.3 per cent of the votes for the State Assembly and won 151 of the 201 seats it contested. The D.M.K., however, in its first election, contested 112 seats and won 15. This was one-tenth of the Congress total but it polled nearly one-third of the votes gained by the Congress (1,622,181 to 5,046,576.)[10] The D.M.K. garnered 14.6 per cent of the total votes cast. In forty-seven constituencies the D.M.K. was runner-up to the Congress, losing by less than a thousand votes in each constituency. Two members were elected by the D.M.K. to the national Parliament (Lok Sabha). The next year, 1958, brought the D.M.K. a stunning victory in the elections for the Madras City Corporation. A. P. Arasu became the first D.M.K. mayor of India's fourth largest city.

The national elections of 1962 demonstrated the D.M.K.'s continued growth. The Congress contested 206 seats for the Assembly and won 139 of them. The D.M.K. fought in 143 and won 50. The Congress percentage of the total vote actually increased, going up to 46.14 per cent. The D.M.K., however, went from its 14.6 per cent to 27.10 per cent. For the Assembly the D.M.K., had about 3.5 million votes to the Congress' 5.7 million. Unlike the rest of India, a two-party system was emerging in Tamil Nadu. The Communists, Socialists, Muslim League and other minor parties were dwindling in strength or fragmenting and were joining in informal alliances with the D.M.K. or Congress. A troubled Rajagopalachari, who resented Kamaraj's "de-Brahminisation" of the Congress, founded his Swatantra party and entered into an unofficial agreement with the D.M.K. whereby neither challenged the other in several constituencies. In effect, the Brahmin Rajaji was supporting the D.M.K. just as the

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[9] S. L. Poplai, ed., 1962 *General Elections in India*, Bombay : Allied Publishers, 1962, p. 28.

[10] Phillips Talbot, "The Second General Elections : Voting in the States," *India*, New York : American Universities Field Staff, 1957, p. 2. See also, R. Hardgrave, *The Dravidian Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

" Dravidian " Periyar was supporting the Congress ! Annadurai was defeated in a bitter contest in his hometown, Kancheepuram but, through the strength of the D.M.K. in the Assembly, he was able to be selected for the upper house—the Rajya Sabha—in New Delhi and, thus, he gained a national platform. The D.M.K. successes in the 1962 elections were impressive but they were to prove to be only a warm-up for the massive victory in 1967, which will be described in the next chapter.

The D.M.K.'s appeal in these year was a combination of romantic nationalism and radical socialism. They retained Naicker's original dream of a Dravidanad composed of the four Dravidian-speaking Southern states. The fact that they had no support, outside of a few pockets of Tamils in the other three states, did not seem to disturb them. A somewhat muted version of the demand for a separate nation, a demand tied to racial sentiment, appears in Annadurai's maiden speech to the Rajya Sabha in 1962 :

> I belong to Dravidian stock. I am proud to call myself Dravidian. That does not mean I am against a Bengali or a Maharashtrian or a Gujarati . . . The Dravidians have got something different to offer the world at large . . . I am pleading for separation of Dravidanad not because of any antagonism but because if it is separated, it will become a small nation, compact, homogenous and united wherein sections of people in the whole area can have a community of sentiment. I am pleading for a national cause, not for parochialism . . .[11]

The demand always had primordial sentiments as well as economics at its core. " The movement is convinced that the North Indian-Brahmin autocracy and monopoly cannot be broken until and unless the axis is sundered.[12] Annadurai continually stressed the cultural over the economic. In the 1962 debate on the Finance Bill he argued that the South suffered from a " regional disparity " in the Centre's economic planning but three times he repeated that

[11] M. Karunanidhi, ed., *Anna's Speeches in Rajya Sabha*, Madras : D.M.K., May, 1962, pp. 17-23.

[12] " Dravid," " The Cry for Dravidastan." *Mysindia*, Bombay : 19 November 1950, p. 8. To my knowledge, this is the first article on the Dravidian movement to be carried by an All-India journal.

his objectives for separation were not based primarily on economics. At one point he went so far as to say, " For separation, I have got other reasons."[13] At another juncture he was baited by a speaker who asked if the regional disparities were remedied would he change his cry for separation. He replied, " My political party's . . . philosophy is something different from such compromises or such subsidies."[14]

Just after that speech, Annadurai led a price rise agitation in Tamil Nadu and was jailed. While he was imprisoned, on Ocobter 20, 1962, the China-India border skirmishes erupted into open warfare. Upon his release, very early in 1963, Annadurai declared that the D.M.K. would suspend all agitation and cooperate with the government.[15] He toured the state urging Tamils to support the defense effort and he bitterly attacked the Communists and totalitarianism. But in January of 1963 when the Centre was debating the addition of a Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution which would ban secessionist political parties, Annadurai fiercely argued against it. Bupesh Gupta, a well-known Bengali Communist parliamentarian heckled him throughout his speech, but the argument Annadurai presented against the amendment was one of his most professional performances. He argued that his party had immediately and spontaneously offered their cooperation to the war effort and he credited " the ability and mobility of thought " of Prime Minister Nehru for " the present unity of purpose."[16] He continued,

> It is the people who have created the Constitution. It is to them that you should appeal. I go to the people with confidence. I would request members of the ruling party . . . to counteract me by educating the public. Why do you give up your rights ? You should suggest to the Government " Do not intervene between us and the public. If Annadurai carries on propaganda for separation . . . we shall meet the people and make the people understand the venomousness of the propaganda " . . . Would the public countenance any-

[13] C. N. Annadurai, *Carry On, But Remember*. Madras : Thooyamala Pathippakam, June, 1969, (speech given 21 June 1962), pp. 56-7.

[14] *Ibid*., pp. 59-60.

[15] A. P. Janarthanam, *Anna : A Sketch*, *op. cit*., p. 39.

[16] C. N. Annadurai, *Carry On, But Remember*, *op. cit*., speech given on 25 January 1963, p. 20.

> body getting onto the platform and saying, "We will welcome the Chinese ?" No. Our people may not be well versed in the sections . . . of the Constitution but they know how to differentiate between good and evil.[17]

This passage gives a flavour of the liberal Annadurai, but it is not a rejection of the hope of eventual separation. However, the Sixteenth Amendment was passed. All candidates for elective office had to declare their support of the Constitution. The D.M.K. officially dropped its demand for self-determination and settled for a demand for greater state autonomy. Perhaps this was merely a tactical move as the more militant members of the party claimed. Events were to prove, however, that abandoning the demand for secession was to give the party greater political appeal.

One other political effect of Annadurai and his D.M.K. must be mentioned. This is the differing politicisation of generations. Many D.M.K. followers came from upwardly mobile non-Brahmin castes. They were often the first in their families to gain a high school or college education. After the 1962 elections, an unusually insightful newspaper article noticed this growing "generation gap.' In an area where the D.K. had been strong, but where the D.M.K. had scored impressive gains, the reporter commented :

> The older generation . . . are still with the D.K. but the rising generation preferred by far the buoyant positive aspirations of the D.M.K. to the . . . iconoclasm of the D.K. In several houses which I visited I could see clearly this conflict between generations. While king-size portraits of D.M.K. leaders adorned the verandahs, pictures of Mr. E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker were to be seen only inside the house . . . For the Annadurai-quoting young men who were still in school or college in 1952 . . . now constitute the D.M.K. leadereship in several parts of the district. Thus, during these years the D.M.K. literally came of age.[18]

This appeal to youth was to prove to be very important in the 1967 victory. After the D.M.K. won that election, Annadurai's cabinet

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17 *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.
18 *The Indian Express*, 16 March 1962.

was the youngest in India—averaging forty-eight years of age. Without counting Annadurai, its average age was only forty-one.

When discussing the *social dimension* of the D.M.K., one must concentrate mainly on caste, again remembering its racial overtones in the consciousness of the Tamils. The older he got, the more Annadurai tried to ameliorate the D.K.'s hatred of the Brahmins while maintaining hostility to their position and beliefs. A 1952 pamphlet says, 'Brahmin interests have always clashed with Dravidian interests and it would be too much to expect of a Brahmin to display a just . . . outlook on matters pertaining to the South.'[19] But even the writer of this fiery pamphlet went on to say, "Of course a way must be found . . . of reconciling Dravidian and Brahmin interests. To find a solution to this problem is one of the main objectives of the Progressive Dravidian Federation."[20]

The solution was found by distinguishing between "Brahminism" and Brahmins. Brahminism has been defined by a D.M.K. leader as

> representing the particular system and practice of life preached by the Brahmins . . . based on irrational beliefs and superstitions. It is not peculiar to Brahmins as these practices have permeated over the centuries to all castes. Some feature of Brahminism can be said to be a division of society into castes and elaborate ritual . . .[21]

The D.M.K. hotly protested when it was called a "communal" (i.e. caste) party and lumped together with such North Indian movements as the R.S.S. or Hindu Mahasabha. Nehru, on January 31, 1957, made such a linkage :

> I believe one of the major demands of communal parties here is to kick out Brahmins . . . It is comic to any understanding person—that anyone should say these foolish things. It is tragic because many people are led away by these foolish cries . . . to paths of violence.[22]

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19 S. Vedaratnam, *A Plea for Understanding*, Kancheepuram : Vanguard, 1952, p. 6.
20 *Ibid.*
21 *Homeland*, Madras, 3 August 1957.
22 *The Sunday Observer*, 10 February 1957.

P. Balasubramaniam, who twenty years earlier had been influential in directing Annadurai into the Justice Party, responded :

> Our creed is that we accept no man as inferior because of accident of birth. All men are treated alike which cannot be considered . . . as a communal creed. Further, we are not here to kick out the Brahmins or anyone from this land ; but we are of the view that those who do not treat others as equals . . . have no place in Dravida Nad . . . From the cradle to the crematorium the orthodox Brahmin considers himself a separate person . . . He wants people to consider him as a representative of God on earth. This idea is really barbaric and repugnant to any civilized person and I consider our Prime Minister as a very highly civilized person who has discarded . . . the barbaric ideology of separateness of Brahminism.[23]

The growing liberalism of the D.M.K.—and its further drifting from E.V.R. . . . is dramatically portrayed in this quotation.

This view of Brahminism was to affect the party's view of radical socialism. It was to retain Periyar's cultural categories, but with an emphasis on practices and attitudes rather than by attacking Brahmins as such. When Annadurai was still a university student he won the Shastri essay contest by writing " Moscow Mob Parade." It provides a valuable insight into his early attitudes toward socialism. He began with a quotation from Shelley and managed to praise Shaw and Rousseau as much as Marx. He was also careful to note that " the socialistic idea is not Russian in origin. The Fabian Society was started in London and Marx spent his last years by the side of the Thames."[24] He was confident that the Russians would modify their extremes and " throw the whole might of their influence on the scale of international pacification and justice.[25] Also, he urged the capitalist countries to stop their condemnation of Russia and " try to solve the labour problem by extending state control over branches of industry, by suppressing red-tapism, by recognising the potentialities of labourers."[26] These last three suggestions he was to maintain

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] C. N. Annadurai, " Moscow Mob Parade," *Students D.M.K. State Conference Souvenir*, ed. K. A. Natarajan, January 24-25, 1970, p. 1.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[26] *Ibid.*

throughout his life but under E.V.R.'s and Justice Party influence he was to tie this to the social-religious issue of caste—to Brahminism. A good statement of Annadurai's definition of radical socialism comes from one of the newspapers he edited :

> Others view socialism purely as an economic or political formula. The D.M.K. believes that the concept of socialism which is necessary in the circumstances obtaining here should take into account the series of social ills which prevail. For example, the evils of casteism, superstition, and what I may call irrationalism have to be done away with as a preliminary to, or at least simultaneously with, the establishment of socialism.[27]

Brahmins being anti-Kamaraj, it was natural for the D.M.K. to make an appeal to them. In this attempt the definition of 'Brahminism' rather than 'Brahmins' helped. Rajagopalachari and his Swantantra Party proved receptive, as has been shown. Rajaji told me, 'Any man who has the support Annadurai has can't be all bad.'[28] He went so far as to say publicly that 'the D.M.K., though a splinter group of the D.K., has shed its class hatred.'[29]

The appeal to Brahmins is only part of the caste politics that any successful Indian party must play. It can be correctly claimed that this made the D.M.K. more bourgeois. It also made them more relevant. Reviewing unexpected D.M.K. gains in Salem District in 1962, a reporter observed : "The D.M.K. had no compunctions about whipping up the caste sentiment, but then the Congress is not above board either."[30] Yet the necessary alliances between groups often moderated the hostilities existing between them. As the D.M.K. dipped deeper into the *varna* structure for support, an increasing number of *jatis* lower on the scale became politicised and, as their primordial sentiments were stirred and gained articulation, their horizons were widened and their involvement in the entire Tamil region—and in India—was strengthened.

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[27] *Homeland*, Madras, 3 August 1957.
[28] Interview with C. Rajagopalachari, Madras, April, 1963.
[29] *The Indian Express*, 19 February 1962.
[30] *The Indian Express*, 16 March 1962.

In discussing the social impact of the D.M.K. as it related to Tamil Nadu's religious culture, one must mention Annadurai's attitudes towards women's rights. Following E.V.R., he strongly supported widow marriage. His novels *Kumasthevin Pen* and *Rangoon Radha* stressed the emancipation of women. In *Naadum Yedum*, a group of articles drawn largely from his editorials in *Dravida Nadu*, he attacked the story of Iyarpakai Nayanar which appeared in the ancient *Periya Puranam*. In the story, Iyarpakai, a merchant prince of the great Chola seaport, gave whatever he possessed to the Siva *Shaktas*. One day a sensual sage stood before him and asked him for his wife. Iyarpakai gave her to him but the sage turned out to be Siva, who blessed the pious couple for their total devotion.[31] Annadurai asked, " Why did Iyarpakai send his wife along with the Brahmin without her consent ? Why did the wife not question the arrangement ? "[32] To him it was an example of a " typical " Hindu story which degraded women.

Related to this concern for the rights of women, Annadurai championed the cause of " Self-Respect Marriages." As was stated earlier, these marriages had no priest and the ritual was a simple exchanging of garlands between bride and groom. An elder of the caste involved usually presided over the ceremony. There was only one flaw—this type of wedding had never been legalised. Hindu law did not recognise this ceremony. One of the first acts of Annadurai after the D.M.K. was elected was to present a bill to legalise Self-Respect Marriages. On the 18th of July, 1967 the Tamil Nadu Assembly unanimously passed the act. It was this that brought E.V.R. and Anna back together. In his speech before the Assembly, Annadurai was careful to separate Hinduism from caste—one of the few times he ever did so : " I would quote Vivekananda who has said a true Hindu would not admit of castes."[33] He went on, however, to say about the act that " as far as my friends and I are concerned . . . it is the realisation of our dream . . . ."[34] And he appealed to the two sides of the Tamil renaissance—the regional and the pan-Indian

[31] See Suddhananda Bharati, *The Grand Epic of Saivism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-21 for the translation of the story.

[32] See C. N. Annadurai, *Naadum Yedum*. Kancheepuram, n.d., p. 16. I am indebted to Mr. S. Kadhirvel for this reference.

[33] *Tamil Arasu*, September 16, 1971, p. 7.

[34] *Ibid.*

ones—for justification : "Great Tamil scholars like Thiru V. Kaliyanasundaram and Maraimalai Adigal had admitted that Self-Respect Marriage is . . . in consonance with . . . Tamil culture."[35]

When viewing the *cultural dimension* of Annadurai's D.M.K. one must centre on the primordial sentiment of language. The D.M.K. may have moderated the D.K. emphasis on race and caste but it highlighted the issue of language. And, as the anthropologist Bernard Cohn so clearly perceived, when "one gets behind the identification with the language *per se* . . . it is apparent that it is literature, religion, and political history that are being called upon."[36]. While the D.M.K. has become identified with the defence of Tamil language and culture and while it has produced a mass of literature, its contribution to a genuine literary renaissance has not been as productive as might have been expected. Tamil Nadu's most talented modern authors do not seem to be associated with the movement.[37]

Annadurai was a vigorous writer, however, who wrote a few novels and many short stories. They always had a social message, usually propagating his brand of radical socialism and romantic nationalism. A rather typical story, which depicts Annadurai's world view and ethos, is *Sevvazhai* (*The Red Banana*). It tells the tale of a landless labourer, Sengodan, who grows a luxuriant banana tree on the land at the back of his hut. His wife, children and neighbours wait in great expectation for the ripening of the rare red bananas. Sengodan begins to realise that the pleasure he is getting from his tree is because it is all his, unlike the rice fields he helps till.

> The rare red plantain is different from the golden grain of the paddy fields for, in respect of the latter, the labour is all ours whereas the produce goes to the landlord who condescends to throw a fraction of it to us. The plantain is a

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[36] Bernard Cohn, "Regions Subjective and Objective," *op. cit.*, p. 221.

[37] See E. Annamalai, "Changing Society and Modern Tamil Literature," *Mahfil*, Vol. IV, Nos. 3 & 4, Spring and Summer, 1968, pp. 21-36 ; Albert B. Franklin, "Current Tamil Literature," *Thought*, July 24, 1971, pp. 16-18 ; Vimala Manuel, *Man in Modern Tamil Fiction*, Bangalore : CISRS, 1973 ; Kamil Zvelibil, "New Voices in Tamil Poetry," *Indian Literature*, New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi, (January-June, 1973), pp. 153-163.

> symbol of our toil coming to fruition and it is ours in absolute right and possession.[38]

But the landowner (interestingly a Mudaliar not a Brahmin) needs red bananas for his daughter's birthday worship service at the temple. Sengodan cannot refuse the landlord's request and gives up his precious fruits. His children weep bitterly and at the end the leaves of the bush are used as the coffin of a poor old woman who lives nearby—"a common occurrence in the world of labour."[39] There is nothing subtle here; the message is clear and the symbols are obvious but this clarity was an important part of Annadurai's appeal as a writer. The message has the undertones of "atheistic hostility" of radical socialism but it seems to argue for a populist style private ownership. This was also part of Annadurai's appeal, and one of the reasons the Marxists felt he was bourgeois.

The outstanding cultural contribution of the D.M.K. in the past thirty years has not been in producing top authors for an educated elite. Rather it has been their ability to aid the rise of a Tamil consciousness among the people. This consciousness is composed of, and catalysed by, romantic nationalism and radical socialism. No force has been so influential in triggering the beginnings of a conscious mass culture in Tamil Nadu as the cinema. In 1963 there were 4,500 movie theatres in India and, despite low admission charges, these theatres drew more than one hundred million dollars in box office receipts.[40] In 1962, the year of the D.M.K.'s first big political success, Tamil Nadu had 840 theatres of which 360 were temporary structures operating in rural areas. For a comparison with the largest state in India, Tamil Nadu had one theatre for every 35,000 people while Uttar Pradesh had one for every 200,000 people.[41] In 1931, twenty-three Hindi films were made in India, one in Tamil and three in Bengali. By 1941 there were seventy-eight Hindi, thirty-two in Tamil, and eighteen in Bengali. In 1951 there were one hundred in Hindi, twenty-six in Tamil, and thirty-eight in Bengali. But by 1962 there were ninety-one in Hindi, sixty-one in Tamil and thirty-seven in Bengali.[42]

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[38] C. N. Annadurai, *Sevvazhai*, trans. T.G.N., *Tamil Arasu*, September 20, 1970, p. 19.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Time*, New York, August 13, 1965.
[41] Interview with S. Krishnaswamy, Madras, July 1963.
[42] Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, Bombay: Orient Longman, 1963, p. 281.

Thus, except during the surge of pan-Indian nationalism at the time of Independence, Tamil films have been the most dynamic regional cinema in India.

Recitation of numbers cannot convey the impact of motion pictures on the populace, however. In India movies have come not after most of the populace was literate, but before. For millions they have provided a window on ohter ways of life, and to different views of their own lives. The role of the cinema in India's cultural life is coming to be recognised. Robert Hardgrave has done some excellent writing on the relation of the cinema to politics in Tamil Nadu and no purpose is served in repeating his material.[43] It is worth emphasising, however, that his survey affirms that "the differences between urban and rural influences are not wide, reflecting the penetration of cinema into rural Tamil Nadu."[44]

My interest in this chapter is not so much the motion pictures and Tamil culture, or even the movies and politics, but rather in the motion picture in Tamil Nadu as it has affected the rise of radical socialism and romantic nationalism, quickening primordial sentiments and affecting Tamil Nadu's religious culture. Anna-durai played a major role in the catalytic effect of the Tamil cinema on the Tamil ethos and world view. In the late 1940's his historical drama, *Chandra Mohan*, telling of the Mahratta warrior Shivaji's battle against the British, was released. Anna, as well as writing it, acted as an evil Brahmin priest. An actor named V.C. Ganesan played Shivaji. He so captured Tamil hearts that E.V.R. renamed him 'Shivaji.' Shivaji Ganesan is today one of Tamil Nadu's most beloved film actors. He became a strong Kamaraj supporter and later a defender of Mrs. Gandhi. After *Chandra Mohan*, with its radical socialist and anti-priesthood themes, Anna wrote the drama *Oruravu* (One Night) which was later made into the movie *Nallathambi* (Good Little Brother). At the same time he wrote the drama *Needhi Devan Mayakkam* (The God of Justice's

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[43] See Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., "Film and Society in Tamil Nadu : A Profile," *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, Indian Institute of Public Opinion, New Delhi, 1971, pp. 1-7. Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., "The Celluloid God : M.G.R. and Tamil Film," in *South Asian Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4, July, 1971, pp. 307-314. Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., "Politics and the Film in Tamil Nadu," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, March, 1973, pp. 288-305.

[44] R. L. Hardgrave, "Film and Society in Tamil Nadu," *op. cit.*, p.3.

Dilemma) which attacked the *Ramayana* of Kambar. He acted the role of Ravana, who he transformed into the hero, thus following the direction of Sundaram Pillai and E.V.R. *Nallathambi*, and other of his movies, can be called "rationalistic socials."[45] They condemned the elite and stressed a socialistic message.

Nallathambi was directed by N. S. Krishnan, who also acted in it. Krishnan was a glittering jewel in the band of personalities involved in the Dravidian cinema scene. In the mid-1940's he and M. K. Thiagaraja Bagavathar were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in what came to be called the Lakshmikanthan murder case. Later he was released and starred in a reformist movie called *Mad Man*, dealing with widow remarriage. Krishnan was, above all, a great comedian who often satrised Brahmins. He was enormously popular and when he tragically died in 1957, his funeral was the biggest Madras had seen until Annadurai's. The D.M.K. made much of Annadurai's relation to Krishnan, stressing, for example, that the last function Anna attended was the unveiling of a protrait of Krishnan in Madras while Krishnan's last function was the unveiling of Anna's portrait in Salem.[46]

In 1949, *Velaikari* (Servant Girl) was released, and this film was even more critical of social and religious custom than *Nallathambi* had been. *Sorga Vasal* (Gataway to Heaven), another attack on the priesthood, followed. *Parashakti*, starring Shivaji Ganesan in his first major cinema role, was produced in 1952. This was the angriest film up to that time. Its criticism of Hindu priests was so strong that the government delayed its release for a brief time. When it did begin its run, it proved to be enormously popular. Unlike the other films, *Parashakti* was not written by Annadurai but by his young follower, M. Karunanidhi.

These motion pictures sum up this early period of Dravidian

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[45] I owe this term to Mr. S. Theodore Baskaran. In September, 1964, I organised for the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS) a conference on "The Church and the Cultural Renaissance in Tamil Nadu." Mr. Baskaran gave a paper on the cinema, "Cinema and the Renaissance," which later appeared in *Religion and Society*, CISRS, June 1965, Vol. XII, No. 2, pp. 51-59. Much of my knowledge of the cinema in Tamil Nadu has been gained from Mr. Baskaran. He has written a book on cinema and politics from 1880-1945, S. Theodore Baskaran, *The Message Bearers*, Madras : Cre-A, 1981.

[46] A. K. Moorthy and G. Sankaran, *Convocation Addresses of Anna*, Thanjavur : Appar Book Stall, 1971, p. 18.

movement film activity. In *Velaikari*, the star squanders his money on worship (*puja*) to the goddess and then ends up overturning all his offerings, accusing the deity of exploiting the poor. Annadurai included in the script the *siddhar* Tirumular's famous statement, "One God and one community." In *Nallathambi*, the wife is looking at a clock, counting the minutes, hoping none will claim the boy she has found and raised. She starts to pray to the god Murugan. N. S. Krishnan, playing the husband, tells her not to pray but rather to turn the hands of the clock ahead. And in *Parashakti* a Brahmin priest attempts to seduce a girl in the sanctuary of a temple.

As the rationalistic socials declined (not so coincidentally with the rise of D.M.K. political strength), a related type of D.M.K. movie was rising. This type was less critical of social practices, but stressed romantic nationalism. The hero of many of these films was M. G. Ramachandran (M.G.R.) who took Douglas Fairbanks as his model. A picture called *Nadodi Mannan* (The Vagabond King) was typical of this genre. Loosely based on *The Prisoner of Zenda*, it propagated the goal of Dravidanadu. The opening song began :

> O divine Tamil, we bow to you who reflect the
> glories of ancient Dravidians.[17]

M.G. Ramachandran, a Malayalee by background although he had always lived in Tamil areas, was to be the figure who split the D.M.K. and later was to be elected Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

M.G.R. and Shivaji Ganesan became the major cinema personalities around whom motion pictures and political activity coalesced. Film *manrams*, or societies, sprang up in urban and rural areas. Students might form one but it was more common to find them among the working classes. Tamil Nadu became full of these voluntary associations, focused on a film star but actively engaged in voluntary Congress or D.M.K. activity. A *manram* leader became a powerful figure in his neighbourhood.

For Annadurai, art was not for art's sake, but for the promotion of his social and political messages. But if his art did not imitate

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[17] E. Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

life, politics began to imitate the cinema. Politics became "theatricalised." The Congress, while denigrating this development when it began, soon started to adopt the same style. At the time of Kamaraj's sixty-third birthday, celebrations were held throughout the state. *The New York Times* described one of these pageants :

> A temple elephant with bells on his toes clomped through this town's streets last night to help celebrate this . . . birthday of K. Kamaraj . . . Behind the elephant came pipers, drummers, dancers, torchbearers, bullock carts decked with bunting, and finally Mr. Kamaraj standing in a jeep while an official placed garlands of pink rose petals around his neck.[48]

The fact that the Gandhian and austere Kamaraj let himself be displayed in this manner, shows how effective the D.M.K. techniques had proved to be. Yet, it should be kept in mind that this "theatricalisation of politics" was in many ways a "traditionalisation" of them. These mammoth parades bore much in common with temple festival processions, just as the cinemas often reflected an idealised picture of traditional court life. The garlands heaped on Kamaraj, and other political leaders, remind one of the offerings given to traditional princes or deities. The common man was deeply affected. Styles of dress, of hair, even of walking were faithfully copied from one's favourite film star. In contemplating the effect of the mass media on contemporary India, M. N. Srinivas quoted with approval Milton Singer's comment that "the effect of mass media . . . has not so much secularised the sacred traditional culture as it has democratised it."[49]

The D.M.K. also stressed a new style of Tamil in these movies and in public speeches. Agehananda Bharati was correct when he stated that Tamilisation, like Sanskritisation, is based on a linguistic model. Annadurai, and other D.M.K. leaders "de-Sanskritised" Tamil, not so much by coining new words as by returning to original Tamil terms. This could produce a certain artificiality but, on the whole, it was kept within bounds. With this development came the use of puns and alliterations which

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[48] *The New York Times*, 1 August 1965.

[49] Quoted in M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Bombay : Allied Publishers, 1966, p. 132.

the Tamil crowds adored. Whatever the merits of the D.M.K. style, it had come to stay and other parties desperately attempted to emulate it. The masses expect it on all formal occasions and it has had a major impact on everyday spoken Tamil. The linguist A. K. Ramanujan, has noted that it is not " Brahmin Tamil " but a middle caste, non-colloquial Tamil which is emerging all over Tamil Nadu, gradually eliminating regional and caste dialects.[50]

Tamil movies, like those in the rest of India, are filled with song and dance. The songs are sung by " play back " singers, whose voices are later dubbed into the sound track, because the leading actors cannot sing. While there are many shallow lyrics, some cinema songs are written by good poets and transmit poignant and meaningful messages. The music is often a synthesis of Western popular forms with a touch of the classical Carnatic.

The contempt for the movies, and their many means of transmitting messages which resonate in the imaginations of the Tamil masses, was one of the greatest mistakes the Madras Congress made in the late 1940's and early 1950's. Many Tamil intellectuals continue to show this contempt which is why the language riots of 1965 and the two later D.M.K. electoral victories hit them with such surprise. Virtually everyone, except the common man who emerged as the primary actor, missed what was really happening in Tamil Nadu. Writing with hindsight given by the 1962 D.M.K. electoral showing, Barnouw and Krishnaswamy could say of the 1950's :

> During those years it was clear that the D.M.K. was building strength but most government leaders regarded it with amusement. Rajagopalachari hardly noticed it. K. Kamaraj . . . was openly scornful. He was quoted as asking : " How can there be government by actors ? " For actors he used the most contemptuous term available—" *koothadi* " or " mountebank " . . . The party thrived on the ridicule heaped upon it.[51]

Kamaraj, as has been pointed out, eventually tried to copy the D.M.K. style. One of ironies of Tamil politics is that even the

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[50] A. K. Ramanujan, " The Structure of Variation : A Study in Caste Dialects," *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, ed. M. Singer and B. Cohn, Chicago : Aldine, 1968, pp. 461-472.

[51] Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

D.M.K. was superceded by one of their own who split from them—Tamil Nadu's most popular film star, the swashbuckling M. G. Ramachandran. No one can now discount the influence of the cinema on the Tamil imagination and sentiments.

Annadurai's genius was to stress the emphasis on language, first given by the earlier scholars of the Justice Party and regionally inclined Congressmen such as Tiru Vee Kaa, and to combine this with a modified anti-Brahminism. An early D.M.K. quotation demonstrates how the movement views language as closely tied to the other primordial sentiments of race and religion. Speaking of attempts by the Centre to promote Hindi, a writer says:

> The old Aryan-Dravidian controversy was revived and the Brahmins came to be identified with the Aryans.... Like the Jews of Europe, the Brahmins have no national homeland.... Knowledge of Sanskrit was as assiduously cultivated by the Brahmins as it was rigorously kept out of the reach of non-Brahmins. The regional languages...have been described by the Brahmins as...Sudra languages... The Tamils are...conscious that Tamil is older than Sanskrit and wholly independent of it. The Mohenjodaro and Harappa excavations confirmed the old plea of the Tamils... That the Aryans came into India as barbarous nomads, tending cattle, to find the Dravidian people living in cities and in settled agriculture. This consciousness of worthy antiquity reinforced the pride of the Tamil in his language and hardened the dislike of Sanskrit.[52]

Here, concisely expressed, is the modern myth of Tamil Nadu, a myth built partly on past history and partly on the quickening of primordial sentiments. It may not all be historically "real" but it is "true" for millions of Tamils, not just for a small elite as in Justice Party days but—due to the impact of politics, cinema and pulp literature—for the masses as well.

The primordial sentiment of language, a shorthand for so many cultural memories, provided the spark for the most devastating conflagration modern Tamil Nadu has known. If the 1962 election made a few sensitive observers aware that a new conscious-

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[52] Dravid, "The Cry for Dravidastan," *op. cit.*, p. 7.

ness was arising in Tamil Nadu, the 1965 riots were firm evidence of a cultural revolution, a revolution that would be legitimised in the 1967 elections. The scholar Selig Harrison, in his perceptive and pioneering 1960 book, *India : The Most Dangerous Decades*, was one of the first observers to see the relationship between language, caste, and modernisation :

> India's dilemma today lies in the fact that the same industrial age that provides the technological basis for a unified subcontinental state also emancipates low caste millions whose cultural energies are now self-generating and must now find expression in newly-vitalised regional languages. The dilemma is profound . . . because the renascent regional languages are so immovably entrenched in their historic territories . . .[53]

Harrison's comment makes it clear that some information on the All-India language situation is necessary if the anti-Hindu riots of 1965 are to be placed in a meaningful perspective. The Congress Party pledged linguistic reunification as a part of its Independence drive, but once independence was gained they seemed to fear the centrifugal forces that might be released if they fulfilled their pledge. However, the linguistic resurgence would not be blocked. At the end of 1952 a Gandhian disciple, Potti Srimulu, fasted to the death for his demand that a separate Telugu-speaking state be carved out of the old Madras Presidency. The resulting uproar brought the new Andhra state into existence in 1953, and at the very end of that year, December 29, 1953, the States Reorganisation Commission was established. On October 10, 1955, the Commission's report was released.

On January 16, 1956, the Central Government formulated their decisions on most of the recommendations of the Commission. More demonstrations followed. And in August and September 1956, Parliament finally passed the government Bills and fifteen States and six territories came into being or were reconfirmed in their original, or in a changed form. Trouble was not yet over, however. In Bombay State a bi-lingual formula was attempted but in 1960, after disastrous riots between the Marathi and Gujarati-

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[53] Selig Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

speaking peoples and considerable political losses to a Maharastrian-first party, the Congress High Command gave up and Bombay was split into the states of Maharastra and Gujarat.

It is in the light of the historic interaction between the Tamils and their language that the Tamil opposition to Hindi as the official Indian language must be seen. The Constitution of India recognises all the major languages as national languages but established Hindi as the official language after 1965. As has been shown, the non-Brahmin Tamil fears Hindi because of its relationship to Sanskrit, feeling it will be used to extend Aryan domination over the South, destroying Tamil in the process.

The Tamils, both Brahmin and non-Brahmin, see Hindi as something that will inevitably work against them in job placements. They argue that the person who speaks Hindi or a closely allied language as his mother tongue will have an insurmountable advantage in government examinations and other placements if the examinations are in Hindi or if it is required that an applicant know Hindi as a condition for advancement.

Up until the end of the 1950's university education was given largely in English, providing a unifying force at the top of Indian society. But the legitimate pressures of the increasing demands for education, the linguistic upsurge, and the competition among language groups, has brought regional languages as mediums in many universities. Some universities teach the physical sciences in English and the humanities in the local languages. Thus far Tamil Nadu has kept English as its medium for science subjects. In the humanities, the D.M.K. started Tamil sections but they have not proved popular because of the desire for employment outside of Tamil Nadu.

Thus, all of Madras State, regardless of political affiliation, resisted the attempt of the government to change to Hindi. The Madras Government (Congress Part of Kamaraj) made strong pleas to the Centre to get rid of the 1965 deadline and to continue to use English as a " neutral " central language. In January of 1958 the ruling Congress Party at its national convention accepted the fact that 1965 could not be viewed as an absolute deadline. In 1960, the then President Prasad cautioned the North that official use of Hindi might take time. In early 1962 there were serious

riots in Madras City in which language played a part. Nehru pledged that the South would not be forced to use Hindi until it so desired, even though he urged them to learn Hindi. April of 1964 saw the Central Government, caught between pro and anti-Hindi forces, pass a bill which made Hindi the official language but kept English as an "associate" language that "may" be used. Along with this the much talked of "three language formula" was adopted for education, that is, students would study their own language, Hindi and English. Hindi-speaking students would study another Indian language. Where teachers were found this was done but it meant most Hindi speakers studied Sanskrit as their other Indian language.

Wrath spread in the South over the April compromise. No longer were English and Hindi on a par ; Hindi was now *the* official language, and English "*may*", not "*should*" be used. To the Southerner, who had long accepted that the 1965 deadline was impossible, the "compromise" seemed to raise Hindi to a status it hadn't deserved or gained. Hindi-speakers, on the other hand, also felt betrayed. Congress Party dicipline got the measure through with the Madras Congress supporting it. Tamil Nadu simmered. C. Rajagopalachari called for a united protest. But C. Annadurai and his D.M.K. kept strangely calm, refused to join Rajaji, and later carried on small individual protests involving only a few members. At this time, the D.M.K. was still in the initial stages of disavowing its former secessionist stance.

There was resentment against the D.M.K.'s seeming apathy, however, because in the preceding years it had become the leading focus for anti-Hindi attitudes and because, in the municipal elections of early 1964, Hindi had been one of the issues. In that election, through a coalition of Congress and right-wing Communists, the D.M.K. suffered serious losses in several cities and gained less than expected in rural areas. However, in the premier city of Madras, the D.M.K. regained its prestige by again scoring a victory over the Congress and controlling the city council. A short time before that election a young Tamil named Chinnasamy set himself on fire and died as a protest against Hindi. This was an entirely new form of protest at that time. Up to then, D.M.K. members, including Annadurai, had burned the section of the Constitution dealing with Hindi, and in earlier times D.K. members had burned

national flags, copies of the *Ramayana*, and the Constitution. But they hadn't burned themselves ! The D.M.K. plastered Madras with gaudy posters, inspired by Annadurai, which vividly illustrated Chinnasamy's death and many feel this contributed to their victory. In May 1964 Nehru died and many wondered if his pledge had died with him.

Just before Republic Day—January 26, 1965 severe anti-Hindi riots broke out in Tamil Nadu. They began in Madurai and later spread to certain areas in Kerala and Andhra. The date is s gni-ficant for it was on January 26 that the Bill passed the preceding April, to make Hindi the official language, was to become effective. " Riots " is not a correct term. Perhaps " widespread civil distur-bances " is better. Nothing like them had been seen before in Tamil Nadu, not even during the fight for independence from the British. According to official reports, fifty-two people were killed and there were more self-burnings. Military troops and police shot students and civilians and at least once Tamils soaked police in kerosene and set fire to them. Millions of dollars of damage resulted. The demonstrators especially attacked Central Govern-ment facilities such as post offices and railroads.

A few hard facts emerged. First, after these disturbances no one could claim Tamil Nadu was without its revolutionary currents. Secondly, as the disturbances continued a natural protest coalition emerged—students joined by the restless urban proletariat. Finally, the primary motive was not economic. Demonstrators fought, and some died, not primarily for jobs but for Tamil. Students used phrases such as " It's now or never," " To be or not to be," " a real revolt against Hindi imperialism," and ' our bodies for the soil, our souls for Tamil.'

An objective, thoughtful, middle-aged and middle-class Tamil wrote to me several months after the disturbances, underlining the central issue :

> During January to March of this year, I noticed a definite evolution in thinking as gleaned from the " Letters to the Editor." First it was all emotional, not much reasoning. But as weeks passed by and the agitation kept up its tempo there seemed to develop an awareness that Hindi and Tamil could not coexist at the national and state levels. Sooner or

> later Hindi will overwhelm and consume away the local languages, at least in their vital aspects.

The disturbances must be viewed as flowing from linkage of language, caste, race, and religion. To see them in narrow political or economic terms is to miss the true dynamics of their motive power. At their deepest, they represented a resurgent Tamil Nadu defending what it believed to be the kernel of its culture and identity.

The late Prime Minister Shastri renewed and strengthened Nehru's pledge, offering to give legal guarantees that English would remain an associate language as long as this is desired by the South. But, as reported in *The New York Times* of August 2, 1965,

> Neither the three language formula nor the pledge of legal guarantees impresses the students of Madras. They regard both as " subterfuges " and " facades " behind which they feel the Indian Government will continue to impose Hindi on the South.[54]

In November 1967, months after the D.M.K. had scored its sweeping electoral victory, a Bill to amend the Official Language Act was introduced in the National Parliament. It fell short of the D.M.K. demand that a constitutonal amendment be adopted to ensure the continuance of English as the official language. It only provided that Hindi *or* English be the standard for recruitment to the central services. This satisfied no one since it still seemed to give the native Hindi speaker a great advantage and meant a central service staffed by people who theoretically might share no common language.

Annadurai remained cautious, perhaps fearing Central intervention in the state. Kamaraj, still President of the National Congress, realising the danger of the situation, asked Annadurai if he would join him in issuing a joint statement opposing the language Bill. This was done, but Annadurai's opposition hardened as he was pushed by students and others. In early 1968 all colleges and most schools remained closed as the student anti-Hindi protest continued. Annadurai abolished Hindi teaching in

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[54] *The New York Times*, 2 August 1965.

all public secondary schools with a view to " completely eliminating Hindi from the school syllabus."[55] The National Cadet Corps was suspended in all educational institutions because the orders were supposed to be given in Hindi. Since then Central language policy has drifted. At the present time, Hindi states may communicate with other Hindi states in Hindi, but any state is supposed to reply to another in the language of the original request. Non-Hindi states are always supposed to have an English translation.

This chapter has attempted to relate the effects of the primordial sentiments of race and language, triggered by Annadurai and his D.M.K., on Tamil Nadu's religious culture—its world view and ethos, Annadurai's own world view need some discussion, especially because of Srinivas and Singer's evaluation of the D.M.K. as " atheistic."

A few weeks before his election, Annadurai was interviewed by a journalist from *The Hindustan Times*. The first question was, " You have often been described as an atheist. Would you please clarify your position ? " The answer :

> Oh, no. I was always pleading for real faith in God. I mean by real faith, prayer to God through service and work which will be related to the generating of faith in society. I have always tried to see that our people do not lose faith in God. . . Of course I am a rationalist who wants to end unreason and blind faith in the people. But genuine belief and true faith in God should be there amongst the people so that it helps them to become more and more aware and conscious of their duties and responsibilities to their fellow human beings.[56]

In this definition, as in so many others of Annadurai's, there rests an ambiguity. Ethos seems to be primary. " God " remains undefined but " true faith " is judged by one's actions. However, " duties and responsibilities " also remain unstated.

In one of the many anomalies of the modernisation process in Tamil Nadu, the line most used to encapsule Anna's philosophy of life is one he gave on March 1, 1967, when he was elected leader

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[55] Sagar Ahluwalia, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

[56] Quoted in K. S. Ramanujan, *The Big Change*, Madras : Higgenbothams, Ltd., 1967, pp. 250-1.

of the D.M.K. Legislature Party. Holding a copy of Somerset Maugham's *Summing Up* in his hand, he quoted from it : 'Beauty of life is nothing but this ; each should act in conformity with his nature and his business.'[57] It's a Western quotation but one that can be read as reflecting the very *varna dharma* principles which Annadurai so bitterly attacked.

When I had my final interview with the outspokenly atheistic E V.R., I asked him about Annadurai's slogan taken from Tirumular, "One God and one community." Periyar growled, "It's a vote catching device."[58] Perhaps he was right, but when one checks early statements, such as in his cinema *Velaikari*, made when he was still a member of the D. K., Annadurai's specifically religious comments seem to remain reasonably consistent throughout his career. They are certainly not "atheistic."

Writings from the time when Annadurai was still editing the D.K. newspaper *Dravida Nadu* are revealing because they demonstrate that even before the split he had differences with his leader on the issue of God and religion. Here is an example :

> The Aryan culture portrayed a god who had sexual relations in the temple with his concubine. . . The Tamils had a religion without guilt but the Aryans degraded this. They introduced the four castes to the Tamils who had not even known the word *jati*. They also introduced the perverted *varna dharma* among the Tamils who had a life of equality. . . . This outside culture has made the Tamils useless.[59]

Many of Annadurai's continuing views can be discerned in this quotation. It is not "God" who is opposed, but the Aryan gods such as Krishna and Siva, who are "immoral." It is not religion which is attacked but the religion of *varna dharma* with its inequalities. Unlike E V.R., but like many of the fathers of the Tamil renaissance, he helps create a romantic nationalism by stressing the "purity" and "equality" inherent in early Tamil religion.

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[57] *Madras Mail*, Madras, 2 March 1967. Other admirers of Annadurai have quoted this passage to sum up his world view. See : Sagar Ahluwalia, *op. cit.*, p. 7 ; K. N. Mudaliyar, "My Beloved Anna," *Anna* 60, *op. cit.*, p. 58 ; K. Nageswaran, "The Leader," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, April 13, 1969.

[58] Interview with E. V. Ramswamy Naicker, 10 March 1972.

[59] C. N. Annadurai, *Dravida Nadu*, 13 January 1948. Quoted in "Dr. Anna's Rationalistic Views," *Viduthalai, Periyar Birthday Issue*, Madras : Viduthalai Press, 1971, p. 145.

While Annadurai could praise early Tamil religion, and even use a Tirumular quotation as a key slogan for his movement, he could find nothing good in Saivism : " It is quite certain no one with sense would accept it as his religion. "[60] As did Periyar, he seems to have had a warmer feeling for Jainism and Buddhism, although these were certainly " Aryan " religions. In referring to the Kannappan legend in the *Periya Puranam* which I quoted in Chapter Two he asks : " Would those who say, ' Whatever deity you worship, Lord Siva will appear there ' come forward tc destroy Jainism ? . . . . If the Saivites had faith in their saying. . . Why did they destroy Jainism and Buddhism ? "[61]

All of these themes, which Annadurai enunciated in the 1940's, are echoed in an early 1950's speech given by him. This comes from the period just after the D.M.K. was born :

> Is it necessary to link our God inextricably with obscure *puranic* stories ?. . . . Not content with creating the figure of a Mohini, whose charms /were provocative to compel Lord Siva to capitulate before her, we have also clothed God in the figure of a pig (one of the *avatars* of Vishnu) !. . . . Our *puranic* literature is mostly concerned with the romances of Nayanars and Alvars. Their main pre-occupation is with the *avatars* of God, depicting scenes of unbridled vulgarity. . . We in Dravida Nadu today do not possess a God conceived in a manner which is not revolting to our intelligence and good taste. We do not have a God who is not associated with ugliness and obscenity. . . . We must develop that kind of outlook which treats all humanity as one and admits of but one God. We want a God who asks of us only our love. We refuse to have anything to do with gods which want us to give them palaces, prietsts to serve as their middlemen, wives, mistresses, lands and costly jewels and festivals. . . . If only God were to address the people direct, he would say : " How foolish ycu are. I created the world. I created the waters and the grains. . . Above all, I gave you intelligence with which to differentiate between right and wrong. . . . All I want is that you should love the poor and downtrodden and try to improve their lot. "[62]

[60] *Dravida Nadu*, 28 December 1947.
[61] *Dravida Nadu*, 1 July 1947.
[62] S. Vedaratnam, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

Viewed from one perspective, this remarkable speech can be seen as " modern " ; but viewed through the lens of history, it could have been said by the *siddhars* or even by some of the Nayanars and Alvars that Annadurai attacks. Ramalingaswamy would have agreed with most of it. It must be admitted, however, that this theistic statement has a strong emphasis on " intelligence " rather than on grace.

The other major source of Annadurai's and the D.M.K.'s early views on religious culture comes from other another almost inaccessible pamphlet, A. S. Venu's *Life of Annadurai*, written in 1953. Venu was Anna's personal assistant in those pioneering days. Venu discussed Annadurai's world view by linking it to earlier historic movements against priestly domination. He went on to say, " Annadurai believes in the existence of one God and it is in his opinion beyond human perception. He hates the caste system. He loves the theory of brotherhood. "[63] Then he specifically linked Annadurai to the two precursors of modernism which Bellah mentioned in the essay, *Meaning and Modernization*, the French Revolution and the Protestant Reformation :

> " Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains," wrote Jean Rousseau on the eve of the French Revolution. But the most terrible and least felt are those chains which curb his soul and spirit. The breaking of this chain has been the noblest service of Annadurai . . . Annadurai is essentially a Puritan of Puritans most fitted to lead . . . His reforms covered no hasty measures, but were based on a proper understanding of the genius of our race and the traditions of our society . . . This task . . . has earned him the title of *Arignar* (" knower of things " or " Genius ").[64]

One must grant that Venu is a devoted disciple, not a careful critic, but his linking of Annadurai to modern movements and to Tamil tradition does reveal much of the secret of Annadurai's appeal.

Another, more Indian, influence was applied to Annadurai, especially after his death. E. V. R. surely would not have been related to this, and old Justicites must have shuddered. For after

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[63] A. S. Venu, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Anna's death, his concern for the poor was repeatedly emphasised by the D.M.K. and was related to Gandhi. At the time of the inauguration of the Slum Clearance Board, one of the D.M.K.'s most effective innovations, the party newspaper commented :

> Mahatma Gandhi said once that if God wanted to appear before a poor man, He would have to do so in the form of *roti* (bread). Dr. Anna went a step further when he said we would be able to see God only in the smiles of the poor.[65]

Whether this is really "further" or not is debatable, but that article shows how a party which had its historic roots in anti-Gandhism, became a government which fervently celebrated Gandhi's birthday. Indeed, Annadurai was called "*Thennattu* Gandhi"—the Gandhi of the South. "To his adoring followers Anna could do no wrong for he was to them Gandhi, Shaw, Ingersoll, and Garibaldi rolled into one."[66]

After the D.M.K. came into power in 1967, Annadurai's most specific anti-Hindu action was his government circular, issued in July, 1968, banning portraits of gods and goddesses in government offices.[67] This action caused a certain flutter but it can be viewed as supporting India's secular Constitution, not as an act which repudiates any idea of God. While portraits of gods and *gurus* were banned, pictures of Tiruvalluvar blossomed in government schools and offices all over Tamil Nadu. The Government Transport Ministry, headed by M. Karunanidhi, even put *Tirukkural* slogans on the front of every Madras city bus.

Annadurai, although he often attacked traditional festivals, promoted two festivals in Tamil Nadu. One was modern, one was traditional. The modern is May Day, testimony of the D.M.K.'s loyalty to radical socialism. From the earliest days of Periyar's Self-Respect Movement, he had advocated the celebration of May Day and when the D.M.K. came into power, they formally instituted it as a state holiday.

The traditional festival which has been revived and reinterpreted by the D.M.K. is *Pongal*. *Pongal* probably has its roots in

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[65] *The Rising Sun*, 15 October 1971.

[66] K. Nageswaran, "The Leader," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, April 13, 1969, p. 11.

[67] Sagar Ahluwalia, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

an ancient Tamil harvest festival. P. Thomas, an expert on Indian festivals, points out that it is not mentioned anywhere in the *puranas*.[68] Caught in the processes of Sanskritisation, it became associated with *Makara Sankranti,* the time of the winter solstice. *Sankranti* festivals are celebrated in many parts of India, but in Tamil Nadu this period also coincides with the end of the northeast monsoon and the gathering in of the harvest. Traditionally in Tamil Nadu it has been a colourful festival, lasting three days. The first day, *Bhogi Pongal*, emphasises the ties of the family ; the second day, *Surya Pongal*, the new rice is cooked and offered to the sun god, *Surya* (a " Sanskrit " god). When the rice boils over (*pongal*) it is considered to be an auspicious sign for the coming year. The third day is the unique *Madu* (Cattle) *Pongal*. Cattle get a day of rest, are washed, fed sugar cane, and their horns and bodies are painted in bright colours. In villages, young men battle bulls in the frightening *jellikattu* or bull fight. In the Tamil version (similar in some ways to the bull dancing of ancient Crete) a man is more likely to be killed than is the bull.

The D.M.K. promoted a revival of this ancient festival. Photos of political leaders adorn villages at festival time, cows are painted in the D.M.K. colours of red and black, and bulls have their horns decorated in the same shades. Bullfights are held under crepe paper streamers of party colours, or under party flags. It didn't take Kamaraj's Congress long to follow the D M.K. lead and saffron, green, and white began to mingle with red and black in villages at *Pongal* time. A leading D.M.K. journal reinterpreted *Pongal* in the following manner :

> This festival is the festival of agriculture, celebrated only in Tamil Nadu. It is a harvest festival auguring prosperity to the peasants . . . The D.M.K. and D.K. identified *Pongal* as a festival of significance to the Tamils. It is free from any superstitious belief or fabricated myths. It is a pragmatical (sic) festival . . . It helps the people feel the importance of agriculture. Before manual labours were . . . underesteemed. The farmers were neglected and they suffered a lot in the hands of the money-lending class. The significance of *Pongal*

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[68] P. Thomas, *Festivals and Holidays of India*, Bombay : D. P. Taraporevala Sons and Co., 1971, p. 13.

> as elucidated by the rationalists . . . was felt by the educated youths and the public . . .[69]

One can easily discern the themes of romantic nationalism and radical socialism in this so called "rational" festival. The paradox of the religious impact of the Dravidian movement is clearly illustrated. *Pongal,* whatever its roots, is associated with the Sanskritic *Makara Sankranti* and with the "Aryan" god Surya—especially on the second day. Pre-Aryan influences are probably retained, such as the harvest emphasis and the bull fighting. Yet, when the D.M.K. emphasises *Pongal,* it is not only stressing ancient Tamil rituals and modern regionalism and concern for equality; it is also utilising symbols which relate the Tamil region to pan-Indian Hinduism. Thus, it is aiding the continuing processes of Sanskritisation. A case can be made that the D.M.K.'s interpretation is added on to the earlier meanings of the festival. It would be difficult to show that those earlier meanings had been replaced—just as the original harvest significance was not replaced by later pan-Indian symbolism. Regional Hinduism and Sanskritisation are strengthened, not secularised, by the D.M.K. support of *Pongal.*

To sum up this chapter and Annadurai's world view and ethos—and to focus on the symbols he used to integrate each—we shall look at a speech he gave at Annamalai University on November 18, 1967. Annamalai was the non-Brahmin university founded under Justice Party influence in the 1920's and had been a hotbed of D.M.K. sentiment in the years of their rise to power. This speech of Annadurai's was included in the "Souvenir Issue" of the D.M.K. Student's Conference held in 1970.[70]

The speech demonstrates the extraordinary ability of the avuncular, pudgy, always somewhat unshaven Annadurai to manipulate symbols which link past and present, continuity and change. He began :

> You graduates . . . have got to undertake the special task of carrying the message that our classics contain to the entire

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[69] "Pongal : A Rationalistic Festival," *Tamil Arasu*, January 16, 1972, p. 3.
[70] C. N. Annadurai, "Anna Speaks to Graduates," *Students D.M.K. State Conference Souvenir, op. cit.*, pp. 45-52.

> world and declare that what was the most ancient here is what is being introduced today as the most modern.[71]

One sees in this quotation a perfect example of "traditionalising the modern" which Singer correctly identified as a key feature of India's response to change and which forms an important component of Srinivas' concept of Sanskritisation. Annadurai, of course, is using it as part of a process of "Dravidianisation" or "Tamilisation." However, as Agehananda Bharati pointed out, this Dravidian model is based on a linguistic-literary model (as is Sanskritisation). Annadurai continued :

> South India is the home of the most ancient culture. Though for a fairly long period there was the mist of ignorance, thick and widespread, it has now been acknowledged by all that Dravidian civilisation of a highly developed character can be traced back to the second and third millenia before Christ. Many a foreign scholar has borne testimony to the perfection with which the Tamil language has been developed into an instrument of precise and subtle thought and to the beauty and richness of the literature . . .[72]

He followed this touch of romantic nationalism with a tint of radical socialism :

> Carry the message this university has given you, wherever you go, whatever the station you find yourselves in and elevate the common man—the average man—who is the backbone of this and other countries.[73]

He then returned to his literary theme and listed a cluster of quotations from Tamil literature. He began with the almost inevitable *Tirumanthiram* quotation from Tirumular : "Only one God and one community."[74] This was followed by the almost equally inevitable *Puram* 192 : "Every country is my country, every man is my kinsman." Next came a verse from the *Kurunthogai* anthology of

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[71] C. N. Annadurai, "The Supreme Task of a University Today," ed. and trans. A. K. Moorthy and G. Sankaran, *Convocation Addresses of Anna*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-3.

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 41. All thef ollowing quotes come from this source, pp. 41-2.

Sangham aham poetry, but it is a somewhat Sanskritised verse reflecting a *karmic* approach : " Nothing but deed is the soul of man." This was echoed by another *puram* verse, " God and evil come to us not through others but by our own acts." Several other *puram* verses were mentioned, two of which were : " As the people so is the country," and " The use of wealth lies in benefaction." He ended with a quotation from that " sacred " book of the Tamils, the *Tirukkural* of Tiruvalluvar (verse 322) : " Sharing food with others and guarding all lives in this world is the essence of the advice given by the wise." Later in the talk, he again used the *Kural* (verse 734) to enunciate his view of his ideal nation : " A country free from excessive hunger, endless disease, and destructive enmity."[75]

In this speech one finds the anomalies and ironies which were portrayed in Anna's funeral and in the festival of *Pongal*—and, indeed, in Annadurai's entire life. Choosing from a vast pool of possible symbols, he articulates —to use Singer's term—a " Dravidian Great Tradition." The " modern " concepts of romantic nationalism and radical socialism are firmly linked by these symbols. Contrary to Singer and Srinivas, however, this tradition is neither atheistic nor isolated from the All-India Great Tradition. The quotations from Tirumular and Tiruvalluvar represent Sanskritic as well as early Tamil influences. From the less Sanskritised *Sangham* literature, Annadurai chose some of the most Sanskritic verses. While the theism comes from a specifically Saivite source, it is not tied to Saivism or any other sect of Hinduism. The theism he articulates is consistent with Annadurai's long-held view of a God " beyond human perception." Ethical action, however, accompanies—and even justifies—that God and Annadurai became specific in articulating those ethical principles.

This speech, and the D.M.K., can be viewed as just an expression of Tamil Nadu's primordial sentiments. One can also interpret the movement as being the spearhead of a Little Tradition. If one adopts the more common definition of a Little Tradition, however, the D.M.K. is obviously more than this. From the perspective of Tamil history, it seems more accurate to discern in this speech and in the Dravidian movement an articulation,

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[75] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

rationalisation, and reinterpretation of a long regional tradition, one which mediates between its own Little Traditions and the All-India Great Tradition, and one which both crystallises and tempers primordial sentiments. Annadurai's regionalism was infused with liberalism. Thus, Annadurai was an exponent of both Tamilisation and of Sanskritisation—and of modernisation.

This chapter began with a description of the *Anna Samadhi*, a metaphor for the man and for the movement, a representation of a cultural transformation. When one visits that monument one must remove one's shoes before being allowed to proceed. One sees masses of visitors, many of them villagers, travelling to the city on tourist buses. As they kick off their sandals and walk up the immaculately swept marble pathway, they often fall silent and, upon reaching the marble circle, they reverently place garlands of flowers on the monument's base or smear it with sandalpaste or vermillion. A sense of devotion mingles with the scent of the roses and jasmine. One feels that in the imaginations, in the consciousness, of these Tamils the image of Annadurai as historical personage is blending into a classical image—joining the many other human representations of social transformations that have marked moments of Tamil Nadu's past. These Tamils do have an awareness of history, however. They perceive themselves as *Tamils*, a people moving through time. They glory in a selective view of their past, they endure and enjoy an ambiguous present, and they confront the future with expanded expectations. This "new mentality" is part of the legacy of Annadurai. It remains, however, a mentality with many ties to the past.

CHAPTER VI

M. KARUNANIDHI : CHAMPION OF RESURGENT REGIONALISM

Muthuvel Karunanidhi is of a generation younger than that of Annadurai and so is representative of the more rambunctious *thambis* of Anna, their elder brother. He represents a hardening of Tamil Nadu's idioms of transition. When one meets him, one is impressed by the energy that emanantes from him, despite his small and compact frame. Lithe and handsome, he has an almost feline grace that reminds one of a small but dangerous panther. In 1970, when I first met him, the then forty-six year old Karunanidhi looked not more than thirty except for an almost perfectly round tonsure of baldness on the back of his head.

Karunanidhi has a historical continuity with the earlier leaders of the Tamil awakening, with Ramaswamy Naicker, and with Annadurai. His blend of romantic nationalism and radical socialism is transmitted in virtually all of his writing and speaking. For example, on August 23, 1970, Chief Minister Karunanidhi gave a speech at Madurai University. It was just after he returned from a world tour. Part of the speech went as follows :

> Recently, I have toured a small part of the world. I saw the fame of our Tamil spread over those places . . . They said it is a lyrical language . . . not by hearing my speech but feeling the gentle breeze of that Tamil wafted by many others . . . My heart swelled with pride because of the fact that Tamil has once again attained its pre-eminent position as a distinct language full of light, life, and luster. Even so, my heart felt an inexplicable pang of pain. Why? Thousands of the sons of Mother Tamil are steeped in poverty. I have seen skyscrapers there. My eyes are filled with tears at the galling thought as to when the Tamils will also achieve a full, happy life . . . If many of us work , . . the age-old blind fatalistic notion that only a few are born to work will disappear . . . This is the mirror which will reflect the prosperity of

> the nation. It is not enough if we see our face alone in this mirror. It must also reflect the philosophy of socialism.[1]

Later he quoted the renaissance poet Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai, 'The Tamils are a distinct race which has exceptional qualities of its own.'[2] The entire speech breathed the fused themes of radical socialism and romantic nationalism.

Karunanidhi also accepts, propagates, and develops the contemporary Non-Brahmin view of past history. For him, that view begins linguistically with the touchstone of the modern Tamil, the *Sangam* Age. "The poems of the *Sangam* can find a prominent place in an anthology of the best poems of the world."[3] He criticises scholars of India for overconcentrating on the North and echoes Sundaram Pillai's feeling by saying, "the scientific historian of India ought to begin his study with the basin of the Cauvery, of the Vaigai, rather than with the Gangetic plain . . ."[4]

In addition to *Sangam* achievements and early Cauvery culture, Karunanidhi returned to the Indus Valley discoveries :

> Historical researches and archaeological findings have proved beyond doubt that the Dravidians enjoyed a high standard of living and a civilisation even before the advent of the Aryans into India. The discovery of the Indus Valley civilisation . . . is a landmark in Dravidian history.[5]

Karunanidhi also tied his administration to the Chola Empire :

> Though the system of administration in the ancient period was monarchy, it was a benevolent monarchy with all the attendants of modern social democracy. Justice, peace, and prosperity strengthened the entire social structure . . . The civic administration of the Cholas was unique in that the village . . . was then the basic unit for the administration and guilds and councils moulded the affairs of the people in the larger towns.[6]

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[1] M. Karunanidhi, "Come to the Succour of the Poor," trans. in *Tamil Arasu*, September 15, 1970, pp. 35-36.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[3] M. Karunanidhi, "The Tamils, Past and Present," *The Times of India Weekly*, 27 February 1972, p. 8.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*

Thus, Karunanidhi continues to create a useable past from a selective choice and interpretation of historic symbols. For the outside observer, the ironies and anomalies are numerous. For example, the Chola Empire of Raja Raja was a major Sanskritising agent in Tamil Nadu. In listening to Karunanidhi, however, one hears the idiom of the Tamil social-psychological revolution of modernisation. No contemporary political figure more eloquently articulates this idiom than does the poorly-educated, low caste, yet extremely intelligent Karunanidhi.

While representing continuity with the Tamil awakening, Karunanidhi also demonstrates the deepening of the movement into the lower and less-educated strata of Tamil society. He was born, June 3, 1924, in a small village called Tirukkuvalai, near Tiruvarur, in the fertile delta of Tanjore District. This was an area where Brahmins were often the landlords and where social discontent continues to grow with the same fecundity as does the abundant rice. Karunanidhi comes from a *jati* known today as *Isai Vellalas*. Traditionally, they were termed *Melakkarans*, the caste that Arunagirinather had come from. This is the caste which were the offspring of the *devadasis* or dancing girls of the temples. The men played the music for the dances. Edgar Thurston, writing in 1909, said they " have a high opinion of their own social standing . . . but it is doubtful whether any but the lower Non-Brahmin communities would eat with them."[7]

When he was only fourteen years old, he took part in the D.K. anti-Hindi agitation of 1938. Four years later he contributed an article, " Youth Sacrifice " to *Dravida Nadu*, the D.K. paper which Annadurai was then editing. A short time after this he met Annadurai who urged him to continue his studies. Karunanidhi formed the first unit of the Tamil Nadu *Manavar Manram* which was to grow into the Dravidian Students' Federation. His political activity interfered with his education and he dropped out of high school, never to return. Later he was to say it was the only time he disobeyed Annadurai.[8] Karunanidhi was soon editing E.V.R.'s paper, *Kudiarasu*. His contact with Annadurai brought him into

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[7] Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. V, *op. cit.* p. 60.

[8] M. Karunanidhi, " My Memories of Anna," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, April 13, 1969, p. 10.

the drama and motion picture worlds and he wrote the scripts for some of the angrier rationalistic socials, including two that were banned by the Madras government. His most famous script was one mentioned in the previous chapter, *Parashakti*. He is also the author cf many short stories and poems. Later, after following Annadurai out of the D.K., he founded the newspaper *Murasoli* (*Drum Beat*), and the magazine *Mutharam* (*Pearl Necklace*), both of which propagated D.M.K. themes.

As has been pointed out, Karunanidhi led the 195? Kallakkudi riots. In the 1957 election, Karunanidhi was one of the fifteen D.M.K. members elected to the State Assembly. In 1959 he urged Annadurai to undertake an all-out struggle to capture the Madras Corporation. Annadurai finally agreed and made Karunanidhi the chief campaign strategist.[9] After the victory, Annadurai held a public meeting and placed a ring on Karunanidhi's finger as an expression of his appreciation. Karunanidhi retained his seat in the relatively successful D.M.K. 1962 electoral showing. In 1960, Karunanidhi was named Treasurer of the D.M.K. by Annadurai. This was a position he held through his years of power and it was used against him by M. G. Ramachandran in the 1973 D.M.K. schism.

In the anti-Hindi agitation of 1965, Karunanidhi played a major role and was singled out by the Congress government for rigorous imprisonment in the Palayamkottah Jail. There he met S. Ramamurti, a long-time Marxist leader, and the basis for the portentous 1967 electoral alliance was laid. Karunanidhi was again named to be chief strategist for that campaign. His abrasive manner, however, earned him enemies. Besides M.G.R., his chief rivals were K. A. Mathiazhagan, a pragmatic " Leftist " and " Navalar " (Orator) Nedunchezhian, gentle and more " Rightist". Nedunchezhian later joined the A.I.A.D.M.K. and became at least temporary leader of the State when M.G.R. fell ill.

After the D.M.K. came into power, in 1967, Karunanidhi served both as Public Works Minister and as Minister for Transport. He nationalised most bus transport and built a loyal following among the powerful transport workers' union. Karunanidhi

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[9] *Ibid.*

urged that all D.M.K. ministers resign and devote themselves to party work. His enemies saw this (probably correctly) as a means of getting rid of them since Karunanidhi, with his leadership of election strategy, had great support in the lower levels of the party organisation. Annadurai was already ill, although few knew it, and he rejected Karunanidhi's plan. In his final days, Annadurai named Nedunchezhian to look after the Chief Minister's duties but, soon after Annadurai's death, Karunanidhi disobeyed him once again. He challenged for the leadership and it was no struggle. The aggressive and adroit Karunanidhi was elected new leader of the D.M.K. and became Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

Before looking at the winning 1967 election, it is worthwhile to delve into Karunanidhi's voluminous writings because of the light they throw on his world view and ethos. One poem and one story will not be adequate, but they will give an idea of his convictions. A poem called *Love and Glory* harks back to the erotic love of *akam Sangam* poetry and the *pukal*, or " glory " of *puram* poetry.[10] It also illustrates Karunanidhi's refreshing sense of humour, a humour that forms a major ingredient of his striking oratory. He begins with a sly attack on family planning :

Love and Glory
  are twins I would say ;
And family planning
does not come in the way
of begetting these babes.[11]

Then a verse follows praising Ravana's son, revering, as earlier Tamil renaissance figures had done, the " villain " of the *Ramayana*. His next verse uses the imagery of the same segment of Kambar's *Ramayana* which Bharati Dasan utilised ; the story of the love between the princes and the poet. He concludes :

In conclusion, I call upon men and women
to make vigorous love
with glory embellished.
Frustration springs from

[10] Karunanidhi's grandson is named *Pukal.*

[11] M. Karunanidhi, "Love and Glory," trans. and ed. T. G. Narayanaswamy, Madras : Rising Sun Publications, 1970, p. 7.

Love without Glory
and life then gets drained
cf determination.
Glory without Love
is harsh and hard,
and life then remains
wholly unmellowed.[12]

Small wonder youth was attracted to this message but it also pointed back to the *Sangam* Age, touchstcne of Tamil identity.

Karunanidhi has written over fiftv stories. For him, however, as with other D.M.K. leaders, the purpose of art is to transmit ideology. Thus, one story will suffice for our purposes. It is entitled, *The Dust Bin* and is vintage Karunanidhi. The hero is the trash bin which is "meditating". Karunanidhi is able to immediately imply that all meditators are like garbage cans. He then goes on tc describe the trash that is thrown into the bin. First there were a few pages of "Vedic literature" (really *Puranic* material) which allows Karunanidhi to attack the ancient tale of the sage Visvamitrar who is led into sexual intercourse by the miaden Menaka. The trash bin then listens to *bhajanams* (religious songs) that come through a microphone which is near it. The bin is again shocked by more *puranic* stories of gods making love to beautiful young women. Karunanidhi has a marvellous time depicting these love scenes : "Someone approaches and lies down by the side of her mango sweet breasts and locks her up in final embrace."[13]

From these attacks on Hinduism, he moves to modern social problems. A letter is thrown into the bin in which a young woman is promised a job if she pays a middleman three hundred rupees, but the broker takes the money and vanishes. Two charming old beggars, a man and a woman, show up, calling each other "My Queen" and "My King". They have a few happy days by the side of the bin, which has to close its eyes so as not to see their lovemaking. Eventually the police brutally drag them away. Finally a young woman comes toward the bin with a newborn

[12] *Ibid.*
[13] M. Karunanidhi, "Dust Bin," *Flame*, trans. Vesta Hakim, Madras: Rising Sun Publications, 1970, p. 11.

baby in her arms. The baby is dead, its neck is covered in blood. "The young mother must have wrung the neck of the poor baby and now she . . .throws the remains into my stomach."[14] The baby is killed because the woman is poor and unmarried. Karunanidhi concludes, "How full of sins this wretched world is."[15] These poems and stories read better in Tamil than in English. Karunanidhi's stories are more didactic than artistic, but his writings convey the "modern" combination of romantic nationalism and radical socialism. Touches of sex add to their popular appeal. The stories and poems project the same message as do his screenplays.

The major lens through which we will view Karunanidhi is through the elections of 1967 and 1971. The contemporary quest for meaning and identity in Tamil Nadu is often acted out on the political stage and in these years Karunanidhi was chief election strategist for the D.M.K. The key to the 1967 victory was the United Front or *kuttani.* Many middle and upper class Tamils gave full credit for this Front to Rajagopalachari. However, Rajaji openly opposed the inclusion of the Left Communists (C.P.M.). That inclusion, first discussed when Karunanidhi and Ramamurti were in jail together in 1965, was to prove crucial.

The reason for the alliance was obvious if one looked at the figures. Even in 1962 the All-India Congress won almost 72 per cent of the Lok Sabha seats with only 44.7 per cent of the vote. In India, the Congress, despite its long rule, had never won a majority of the total votes cast. Its parliamentary majorities came because of a fragmented opposition. Karunanidhi felt that if the opposition could unite, victory might come. Annadurai solidified the alliance on the right with Rajagopalachari's Swatantra Party. Karunanidhi nailed down the C.P.M. on the left. The results proved the wisdom of the strategy.

The Congress percentage of the total vote in Madras dropped less than 5 per cent, to 41.52. Its total Assembly vote actually increased from 5,849,000 in 1962 to 6,329,00 in 1967. Even though it won, the D.M.K. polled fewer popular votes that the

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[15] *Ibid.*

Congress—6,222,000 or 40.82 per cent of the total. Lok Sabha results were even more striking. The D.M.K. won all 25 seats it contested, a record no other Indian party could match. But it won those 25 on only 35.78 per cent of the votes. The Congress won only 3 seats and yet it had 41.69 per cent popular backing. The front together, though, polled 7,900,187 votes or 52 per cent of the total. By uniting, a party such as Swatantra, running in 27 carefully chosen constituencies, won 20 seats in the Assembly on 5.2 per cent of the popular vote. In 1962, running 94 candidates, it had polled more votes (7.72 per cent) but had won only 6 seats.

Although the D.M.K. benefited greatly as senior partner from the Front, its victory did not stem solely from that. Probably the D.M.K. helped its partners more than vice versa. The D.M.K.'s popular Assembly vote leaped from 3,436,000 in 1962 to 6,222,000. If the D.M.K. had run alone for all the constituencies it would have won more popular votes than the Congress, but many fewer seats. What the figures seem to show is that while the swing away from the Congress by its traditional supporters was virtually nil, the positive swing to the D.M.K. by non-Congress voters and by those who voted for the first time was overwhelming. Eighty-three per cent of the nearly 21 million voters were below forty-two years of age and of that group, 12 per cent were eligible to vote for the first time.[16] As has been pointed out, youth was firmly in the D.M.K. camp. The results were spectacular. From 50 Assembly seats in 1962 (out of 206), the D.M.K. leaped to 138 out of 234—an absolute majority. Congress fell from 139 to 50. The *kuttani* won all but 3 of the Lok Sabha seats.

Even the wisest observers expected a Congress win. If Annadurai had expected a victory, he would have run for the Assembly, not the Lok Sabha. As it was, he had to resign his Parliament seat and get appointed to the upper house of the State Assembly, so that he could become Chief Minister. The intelligent Marxist journalist, C. N. Chitta Ranjan, writing a month before the election commented:

> The Congress is likely to retain power. This is because its unpopularity is mainly confined to the urban and semi-urban

[16] C. N. Chitta Ranjan, "Outlook in Madras," *Mainstream*, December 10. 1966, p. 11.

> areas, which together account for only 80 out of the 234 Assembly constituencies. In the rural areas. . .the ruling party cannot be said to have lost its hold.[17]

But he did notice the Congress failure "to build up an enthusiastic ......cadre of party workers to keep in close touch with the masses."[18] The D.M.K., in contrast, had four thousand committees throughout the state, each with at least fifty members. They organised over two thousand meetings during the election period, many in rural areas.[19] The Congress had also been well organised, but had become lethargic when Kamaraj left the Chief Ministership to become All-India Congress President.

Kamaraj became world famous for presiding over the first two Prime Ministerial successions in India, being influential in the choices of Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi. In Madras he had been equally effective. His policies emphasised village development. Raising income, he saw, was a long term process but certain amenities such as schools, hospitals, roads, protected water supplies, electricity, and irrigation could be provided. By 1961 Tamil Nadu was fifth among the states in per capita income (Rs. 334 a year), and was the only state in which one hundred per cent of the population lived in districts which fell into the top two quartiles of levels of development.[20] Between 1951 and 1966 electricity was extended from 1,813 to 22,103 villages. The densely populated and semi-arid state, through widespread use of electric pumpsets, had a 100,000 metric ton rice surplus by 1966. Tamil Nadu had long had a good record in education. In the 1880's Tamil Nadu had a higher level of literacy than any other province (but lower than the southern princely states of Travencore and Cochin). It was not until 1939-40 that Uttar Pradesh (United Provinces), with a much larger population, pulled ahead in the number of enrolled university and secondary students. Tamil Nadu continued to enroll twice as many students at the primary level as Uttar Pradesh.[21] This development was a double-edged

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[17] *Ibid.*, p 9.
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] S. Ahluwalia, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
[20] Census of India, 1961, *Levels of Regional Development in India*, New Delhi : Government of India, 1961, Vol. I, Part I.
[21] Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph, *Education and Politics in India*, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1972, p. 65.

sword, however. Structural modernisation brought a heightened awareness to all of Tamil Nadu. Urban and rural dwellers proved not to be too dissimilar. After the election a Congressman said bitterly :

> It is by spreading education we of the Congress Party unknowingly gave to the D.M.K. 150,000 full-time paid workers in the form of elementary school teachers. They have all been D.M.K. enthusiasts.[22]

One saw signs of the aroused political consciousness everywhere. I visited a tiny village in backward Ramanathapuram District. Walking and bicycling through the area a few days before the election, I viewed evidence of politicisation around me. On the wall of a small outcaste temple, scrawled in Tamil was, "Long live M.G.R". (In one of the more bizarre incidents of the campaign M.G. Ramachandran had been shot by a famous film villain, M.R. Radha, who was a D.K. and therefore Congress supporter. Even at that time, M.G.R. won an Assembly constituency without leaving his bed !) Bouncing back from the village in a country bus, I heard a shrill voice say, "We're going to get a new government when the D.M.K. gets rid of the Congress". It was a village girl, her ears elongated by heavy earrings, her hair heavily oiled. This mass awareness was demonstrated when the time came to vote. Between 1956 and 1962 the percentage of eligible voters who actually voted jumped by 15 per cent. In 1967 it increased by another 8 per cent, making it a hefty 78 per cent—by far the highest in India.

The D.M.K. knew how to increase and tap this political awakening. At the end of December, 1966, I—along with hundreds of thousands of Madrasis—watched for two and a half hours as a D.M.K. procession poured past me. It was the politics of the cinema in full display, and all planned by Karunanidhi : bicycle brigades draped in red and black party flags, home-made floats depicting the rising sun (the D.M.K. electoral symbol) or flaming martyrs for Tamil, and six hundred buses from all over the state filled with party stalwarts. At the rear of the procession, high above a sea of admirers, was Annadurai. He looked like a pudgy

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[22] *The Hindustan Times*, 24 February 1967.

Hindu god on a palanquin. The processionists shouted joyfully such slogans as "Hey, Kamaraj, what's the price of rice today," and "Hindi, Hindi, down down".

This type of procession not only aroused awareness ; it also highlighted the main issues of the campaign—food and language. One issue was economic and the other was cultural. The Congress campaigned on its record when it came to the economic issue, basically a defensive stance. As has been pointed out, the State Congress record was fairly good. There was a black side also, however. The All-India picture was bad. India's always sluggish economic growth had collapsed under the pressure of two debilitating wars and two disastrous droughts. Since 1963 the price level had gone up about 60 per cent. India had devalued the rupee. Madras had produced a marginal surplus of food grains but there had been near-famine in the North. A compulsory ration system went into effect in all major cities in the country so that surplus states could supply deficit areas. This added to regional strains. The public of Madras saw its ration queues, watered and smelly rice, and open black market operations. The D.M.K. campaigned on the slogan : "Three measures of rice for a rupee". It was so patently absurd that the Congress made the slogan an issue. The public seemed to feel it was symbolic, however, and meant the D.M.K. would at least lower prices. One taxi driver wryly told me, "If I can get *one* measure for a rupee, I'll be happy."

Hindi proved to be an even more significant issue. The anti-Hindi riots were still very much in the memory of Tamils. Two years after the outbreak of those riots, in January 1967, new confrontations between police and students took place. The seventy-two year old Congress Chief Minister, M. Bhaktavatsalam, used his police powers freely. Even Kamaraj, for all his political knowledge didn't fully understand this resentment. The president of the All-India Congress, king (and queen) maker in Delhi, was defeated in his own constituency by a twenty-seven year old former student and leading D.M.K. member. The balance was tipped by over two thousand five hundred students that the Anti-Hindi Students' a by-product of the 1965 riots, were able to put into the constituency for campaign work. Annadurai knew that the anti-Hindi issue was the key factor in his victory. A few months after he became Chief Minister he said, "That is exactly why this govern-

ment was brought into existence—it represents the determination of the people not to be coerced into accepting Hindi as the official language."[23]

When one searched beneath the more official speeches one discovered how deeply the new political awareness was tied to primordial sentiments. Again language stood as a symbol for a whole range of cultural resentments. These sentiments were being spread by the new structures modernity had brought to Tamil Nadu. For example, Karunanidhi pioneered a technique whereby political verses were set to the tunes of popular cinema songs. These tunes, which had played in movie houses all over Tamil Nadu and which blasted forth from loudspeakers in every village, were known to virtually all Tamils. The new lyrics were printed in pamphlets which could be bought for a few *paise* at tobacco and newspaper kiosks everywhere, in villages and in cities.

A couple of examples will give a sense of this effective propaganda. The first illustration explicitly linked the ancient Tamil concept of *manam* (integrity or honour), which was discussed in my second chapter, with language. A dash of economic resentment was added :

> Should Hindi rule the South ?
> Should the position of sweet Tamil deteriorate ?
> Should the North Indians arrogantly cheat us ?
> Should we lose all the taxes we have paid ?
> Is not this the responsibility of the Tamil
> with his *manam* ?
>
> Is not our Tamil famed for its fine literature ?
> Is it not the only way to prosperity ?
> Is this not the land that was ruled by the three kings ?[24]
> Is this not the responsibility of the Tamil with his *manam* ?[25]

Another song tied *manam* to primordial sentiments but also fastened it to the charisma of the culture hero, Annadurai. It

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[23] C. N. Annadurai, Moorthy and Sankaran, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-5.
[24] The Pandya, Chera, and Chola Kingdoms.
[25] Ramasamy and Ramachandran, *Urmaipaddalgal*, Madras : Bhumagal Buddha Pannai, n.d., p. 8, trans. with the help of S. T. Baskaran.

made an appeal, also, tc the religious sentiments of the minority communities :

In Grace he is like Jesus. Hail Anna !
In Dignity he is Buddha. Hail Anna !
He is Mohammed Nabi. Hail Anna !
Praised by this world
To bring us the glory of the past. Hail Anna !
Anna leads us forward. Hail Anna !

With the *Sangam*, he tended Tamil. Hail Anna !
He has the courage of the lion. Hail Anna !
He cares not for life but cares for *manam*.
To protect our rights, he'll take up the bow. Hail Anna !
Like the hedge that guards the crops, he guards our culture.
He sings the praise of the *Kural*, that which crowns
our culture. Hail Anna ![26]

In the message of the song, Annadurai is the broker between past and future—and the protector of the present. The medium used for these songs is modern as is the type of music. Change, however, is traditionalised, and different music with different messages had been spread among the masses of Tamil Nadu for centuries.

The 1967 elections were a political expression of a cultural transformation. Much of the younger generation, many of the lower classes (although not the Harijans) came into their own, bringing a new style to Tamil political life. Gone were the Gandhian spinning wheels. Now it was the "new" Tamil and readings from the *Tirukkural*. Crowds dressed in their best clothes came from village and city just to wander through the staid Secretariat building, hoping for a glimpse of their heroes. When Annadurai made his first radio speech after assuming office all of Tamil Nadu was stilled as its population clustered around restaurants and barber shops to listen to radios. Only a few months later it was official : old Madras State was renamed Tamil Nadu, and a bright neon light, incongruously placed on the battlements of venerable Fort St. George, still beams that message out to the Bay of Bengal.

Karunanidhi's role in the 1967 election was overshadowed by the charisma of Annadurai, but in the 1971 elections the spotlight

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

was on him. Before viewing that election there are three episodes which help place in context the themes related to religious culture and primordial sentiments which appeared in the 1971 contest. The first illustrative incident began with the Trichinopoly D.M.K. General Conference meeting held in February, 1970. Karunanidhi had been Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and Chairman of the D.M.K. for a year, but it was at this meeting, attended by about four hundred and fifty top members of the D.M.K., that he articulated the party's ideals. That meeting was immediately followed by the Trichinopoly District Conference, over which Karunanidhi presided and at which he elaborated on some of the General Conference resolutions. The two conferences gained added interest because they were the first held by the D.M.K. after the split within the national Congress Party. Indira Gandhi headed the "New" Congress and Kamaraj was a leading member of the "Old" Congress.

At the second meeting, Karunanidhi outlined the new party creed :

> 1. We will work without rest following Anna's path ; 2. We will ever oppose Hindi imperialism ; 3. A society without exploitation will be established ; 4. Autonomy for the states and federation at the Centre ; 5. We will conquer poverty avoiding violence.[27]

These were an updating of the romantic nationalist and radical socialist views the party had long held. The fourth slogan brought a new emphasis to old ideas, however. It will be remembered that after the China-India border war and the passage of the Sixteenth Amendment, the D.M.K. changed its constitution to a demand for greater autonomy for the states, rather than secession. The 1967 Election Manifesto downgraded the issue, asking in paragraph 42 for "more powers for the state and for a federal form of government"[28].

The 1970 General Conference, in elaborating on its fourth goal, became more specific. It called for "autonomy for each state and for a federation of representatives of states to rule at the Centre. This federation's representatives are supposed to be

[27] *The Indian Express*, 24 February 1970.
[28] *Home Rule*, 8 January 1967.

elected along with the election of Chief Ministers of the ruling parties in each state."[29] The new Tamil slogan was *Maanilathil Suyaatchi, Mattiyil Kuttachi*—"More autonomy for the states and a coalition at the Centre."[30] A day later, in a clarification, Karunanidhi states that the government at the Centre would be a "federal partnership (*kuttachi*) and not a coalition (*kuttani*).[31] He also named a committee of former Justice Party members, Dr. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, P. V. Rajamannar, and Chandra Reddi, to suggest specific proposals for the evolution of power from the Centre to the states.[32] Gurnam Singh, then the Akali Dal Chief Minister of the Punjab, was at the conference and allied himself with the D.M.K. on this position.[33]

The D.M.K. conference was enough to cause the respected Indian columnist, Nandan Kagal, to express alarm and write, "Having given up its secessionist plank a few years ago . . . the D.M.K. now calculates that the time has come for it to move forward again towards its old objective."[34] Kagal may have been guilty of some overstatement, but on July 14, 1974—long after the report of his Justicites with their detailed and specific recommendations, had been prepared—Karunanidhi restated his position. He argued for

> a truly federal set up at the Centre with vital subjects like foreign affairs, defence, currency, and communications ; and the other subjects to the states which are closer to the people, to function without restraint in these spheres. The set up will insure the integrity of India with the people of different languages, civilisations, and cultures free to promote economic development rapidly . . .[35]

He also made the Union's truncated authority subject to an Inter-States Council.[36] This is important because it illustrates that

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[29] *The Indian Express*, 23 February 1970.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *The Indian Express*, 24 February 1970.
[32] *The Indian Express*, 23 February 1970.
[33] In the recent 1984 election, Karunanidhi took much the same position and asked for the repeal of Article 356 in the Constitution which allows the Centre to dismiss duly elected state governments.
[34] *The Indian Express*, 26 February 1970.
[35] V. S. Thirumalai, "Karunanidhi Speaks," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, July 14, 1974, p. 40.
[36] *Ibid.*

Karunanidhi's romantic nationalism is more hardline than that of his mellowed former leader, Annadurai, and probably harder than that of M.G.R. and the A.I.A.D.M.K. If anything, primordial sentiments are even more important to Karunanidhi than to Anna. The effect of this on religious culture will be examined later.

Kamaraj, trying to regain his regional image, got into the act, attempting to tar the D.M.K. with the Centre's brush and also attempting to stake out a strong anti-Hindi position for his Old Congress. He demanded a law "implementing Mr. Nehru's assurances to the non-Hindi people"[37] and he pointed out that the D.M.K. was supporting Mrs. Gandhi who had not given those assurances. Kamaraj was proving again just how much a son of the Tamil awakening he was. The New Congress leader in Madras, former Chief Minister Bhaktavatsalam called Kamaraj's stand "unbecoming of a leader of the status of Mr. Kamaraj."[38] (Bhaktavatsalam, it will be remembered, had proved particularly insensitive to the Hindi issue after he replaced Kamaraj as Chief Minister). Then the All-India President of the New Congress, the crafty Jagjivan Ram, came charging into Tamil Nadu assuring the people "that it was not the intention of the central government to impose Hindi on them" and that "Mr. Kamaraj does not stand for the unity of the country."[39] These utterances help explain the unusual alliances that were to appear in the state in the elections of a year later.

The second illustrative incident, foreshadowing the 1971 elections and issues especially related to religious culture, also had its first salvo at the 1970 Trichinopoly conference. At the time the incident was little noticed. A deputation of Vaishnava leaders met with Karunanidhi to present him with a memorandum criticising a proposed D.M.K. bill which would allow the appointment of temple priests without regard to the case of the candidates. Under long-standing state law, the government supervises the administration of public Hindu temples through the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board (H.R.C.E.B.).

[37] *The Indian Express*, 23 February 1970.
[38] *The Indian Express*, 9 February 1970.
[39] *The Indian Express*, 17 February 1970.

The memorandum stated that "the regulations of Hindu temples are governed by time-honoured *agamas* (ritual texts) . . . and only persons endowed with *deeksha* (Brahmins) can perform *pujas* in temples."[40] The deputation also referred to E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker's demand that the government ensure the right of all people to enter the *sanctum sanctorum* of temples. The Vaishnava leaders called this " an atrocious and unjust idea."[41] The chairman of the *Deivika Peravai*, the association of Non-Brahmin Tamil Saivite *maths* (monasteries), supported both the bill and the E.V.R. demand. The Vaishnava deputation, which was not only of a different sect but all Brahmin, ended on a sectarian note, saying " *the Deivika Peravai* . . . should not be allowed to interfere with the rights of Vaishnavite temples".[42] Karunanidhi gave them little satisfaction, only telling them that he " would consult all viewpoints."[43]

In 1971, after its second elective victory, the D.M.K. did introduce and pass the Tamil Nadu H.R.C.E. Amendment, Act 2, which abolished the hereditary appointment of *archakas* (temple priests) in the ten thousand and forty public Hindu temples in Tamil Nadu which appointed such hereditary priests. The goal, according to no less a person than the Advocate General of Tamil Nadu, " was intended to abolish Brahmin monopoly in the religious affairs of archakaship (sic) in Tamil Nadu."[44] The Act was quickly taken to the Supreme Court, where the Brahmin petitioners were represented by Mr. N. A. Palkhivala. In a fascinating judgment the Court accepted Tamil Nadu's argument that hereditary appointment was a secular usage and not a religious usage, thus allowing the state to appoint *archakas* on a non-hereditary basis.[45] However, the Court also ruled that the protection provided by Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution, which deal with the fundamental rights relating to the free practice of religion and freedom to manage religious affairs, are " not limited to matters of doctrine . . . They extended also . . . for rituals and observances, ceremonies and models of worship which are an integral part of religion."[46] For

[40] *The Indian Express*, 19 February 1970, parenthesis mine.
[41] *Ibid.* [42] *Ibid.* [43] *Ibid.*
[44] *The Indian Express*, 12 February 1972.
[45] *The Hindu*, 15 March 1972.
[46] *Ibid.*

Hindus, declared the Court, "the ritual in a temple could not be performed except by a person belonging to a specified denomination; otherwise the purpose of worship would be defeated."[47] This was so, the Court continued, because of the *agamas* which provided that an *archaka* of a sectarian temple must "belong to a particular denomination."[48] The "particular denominations" involved in the case had *agamas* which required that the *archaka* be a Brahmin. Thus, while the Tamil Nadu government technically won its case to appoint temple priests on a non-hereditary basis, it found itself bound by the *agamas* to respect the traditional caste requirements for such appointments. As E.V.R.'s monthly put it: "The object was to appoint *archakas* irrespective of caste or creed . . . The very object . . . was defeated."[49] The D.M.K. did manage to pass a law which made it mandatory that *archanas* (the offering of worship) be articulated in the Tamil language, rather than Sanskrit, unless the worshipper specifically requested Sanskrit.

The third incident foreshadowing the 1971 elections was relatively minor when compared to the autonomy demand or the Temple Act, but it demonstrated Karunanidhi's world view and ethos—and that of his opponents. On September 9, 1970, in the early hours of the morning, a loud explosion was heard in Thyagarayanagar, a strongly Brahmin residential area of Madras City. Upon investigation a small Vinayaka (Ganesh) idol was found in a puddle of water in an area near the police inspector's quarters. The area, after much negotiation, had been allotted to a group of Muslims for the construction of a mosque. Immediately the idol was acclaimed as being *Swayambhu*—self-created. Sri Sankaracharya, head of the famed Saivite *math* in Kancheepuram and spiritual leaders of Tamil Nadu's *Smarta* Brahmin community, declared:

> Let believers in Hinduism and *Swayambhu* continue to worship the Vinayaka with devotion and adoration . . . One who believed in Hinduism . . . should believe that the Vinayaka idol was a *Swayambhu*.[50]

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[47] *Ibid.* [48] *Ibid.*

[49] *The Modern Rationalist*, April 1972. When I had my final interview with E.V.R. the judgment in this case had recently occurred. It was one of the reasons he was planning the mass agitation mentioned in Chapter IV.

[50] *The Indian Express*, 20 September 1970.

Meanwhile, Karunanidhi was expressing his thoughts :

> Whatever might be my views on religion, I am not against others believing in the emergence of idols. But in this case, according to a geologist, there was no evidence of an explosion of the earth . . .[51]

He knew he was treading on troublesome communal ground and continued his remarks in what was, for him, an innovative theme :

> The essence of the teachings of Adi Sankara and Swami Vivekananda is that religion should not deceive the people . . . If deliberately a Vinayaka is planted in a place and people are asked to believe it as automatic emergence, it will be a blot on Hinduism.[52]

Thus, he appealed to the name of the fount of *Smarta* orthodoxy, Sankara, and to the main figure of the modern Hindu renaissance, Vivekananda, as a justification for continuing investigation of the idol. Kanchi Sankararcharya's willingness to encourage popular devotion around the "emerged" Vinayaka contrasted sharply with the Chief Minister's quest for truth.

Huge crowds were coming to worship the idol and by September 29, ten thousand rupees had already been collected at the site. The government ordered the H.R.C.E. Board to take charge of the donations. E.V.R. had no doubts about all this. Referring to the worship of the Vinayaka he said, "Madras is a city of fools to hold such beliefs."[53] On October 10, a month after the emergence, the mystery was solved. A Hindu head constable stationed at the nearby police quarters, was discovered by the Criminal Investigation Department to have bought the idol for seventy-one rupees and had placed it where it was found, setting off a fire-cracker as he did so. His motive was "to thwart the proposal" to build the mosque near his living quarters.[54] Police, acting under the orders of Karunanidhi, waited until after ten o'clock at night, when there were no crowds, to remove the idol and "the entire area was placed under heavy police guard."[55]

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[51] *The Indian Express*, 29 September 1970.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *The Indian Express*, 27 September 1970.
[54] *The Indian Express*, 11 October 1970.
[55] *Ibid.*

The issue was far from exhausted, however. A committee from the area was formed, demanding the idol be restored to the place where it was found. It called the removal " clandestine and highly improper . . . particularly in the face of sustained propaganda by the Chief Minister and his party men that preceded the removal of the idol."[56] The signers of this document included Mr. T. N. Somasundara Nadar, president of the Divisional Old (Kamaraj) Congress ; Mr. Rangaswamy Thevar, president of the Hindu Rightist group, the R.S.S. (weak in Tamil Nadu) ; and Mr. K. Narayana Rao, Madras District Secretary of the Hindu Jana Sangh (also weak in Tamil Nadu). On October 19 a procession made up largely of Jana Sangh members went through Madras City to protest the removal of the idol. It started " from the ancient Kapila Temple in Mylapore with breaking of sacred coconuts and chanting of *bhajans*. A truck with an idol of Vinayaka formed the vanguard of the procession followed by a *bhajan* troupe in another truck."[57]

The procession was organised by the *Veera Sakti Vinayaka Seva Sangh*, whose president was K. M. Subramaniam, an Old Congress member of the Madras City Corporation. The explosive mixture of politics and religion that was to characterise the 1971 election was being created and the Kamaraj Congress was rubbing shoulders with Rightist Hindu groups that had little popular following in Tamil Nadu and which were associated with " pro-Aryan " issues. This unlikely marriage was not as unlikely as it seemed, however. Kamaraj was a son of the Tamil renaissance, but of the more All-India branch of it represented by such figures as Tiru Vee Kaa. As early as August 4, 1965, *The New York Times* carried a lengthy article headlined, " Madras is Swept by a Hindu Religious revival."[58] The main character, around whom the story of this " sweeping revival " revolved, was Balakrishna Sastri, a Brahmin banker. The article pointed out that the revival owed a great deal to political support given by the State's ruling Congress party. *Time* magazine, a week later, seemed almost to plagerise the *Times* in a cover story on India. It mentioned " Madras with its burgeoning Hindu evangelism backed by Congress Party Presi-

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[56] *Ibid.*
[57] *The Indian Express*, 20 October 1970.
[58] *The New York Times*, 4 August 1965.

dent Kumaraswami Kamaraj."[59] Neither publication commented on the Dravidian movement, or the D.M.K., which then had a majority in the Madras Corporation.

Much of what these two articles wrote of was the Brahminic *bhakti*, often Vaishnavite, which Milton Singer has chronicled. Brahminic *bhakti* is indeed blossoming in Tamil Nadu, but there is also a popular *bhakti*, deeply rooted in the regional tradition and strengthened by the fanning of primordial sentiments which modernisation has brought. The failure to distinguish the elite Brahmin *bhakti* from the more popular—and populist—variety is one important reason for the failure of many scholars to distinguish a regional Hinduism.[60] In the whole Vinayaka incident, Karunanidhi acted more like a reformer of Hinduism rather than an abolisher of it.

In the 1971 election all the above issues came together in an explosive manner. The main facts of how the election was suddenly called by Mrs. Gandhi are well known. Ever since the split in the Congress, she had been ruling with a shaky mandate. The D.M.K., "populist and socialist," with its twenty-five Lok Sabha votes, was important to her. But, as has been shown in the discussion of autonomy, while it could agree with her on many economic issues, the D.M.K. opposed her centralising tendencies. By calling the early election, Mrs. Gandhi wanted to separate the elections to state assemblies from those to the Lok Sabha. This concentration on the Centre would make her personality and leadership the major issue without involving the factionalism that blurred issues in many states. Karunanidhi, however, proved as politically adept as Mrs. Gandhi. Despite the huge D.M.K. majority in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, he dissolved his government and called for a state election to be held concurrently with the national one. Mrs. Gandhi faced a dilemma. There was virtually no New Congress leadership in the state, except for the discredited Bhaktavatsalam, the Central Finance Minister, C. Subramaniam, and the young Mohan Kumaramangalam. The latter was eventually to die in a tragic air accident, and the other two did not have wide popular support. Tamil Nadu was one of the few states (with

[59] *Time*, August 13, 1965, pp. 18-26.

[60] Singer, for example, thought a picture of Murugan was one of Krishna

Morarji Desai's Gujarat being another) where the Old Congress remained strong.

To add to Mrs. Gandhi's problems, the foxy Rajagopalachari, upset at both Mrs. Gandhi and at Karunanidhi's drift away from Annadurai's moderation, buried the hatchet with his old foe Kamaraj and pulled into an alliance with the Old Congress. Mrs. Gandhi knew she needed an alliance with the D.M.K. and they welcomed an alliance with her. Without local organisation, however, she was more dependent on them than they on her. Karunanidhi insisted that New Congress candidates could only run for the Lok Sabha, not the Assembly. C. Subramniam disagreed and the budding alliance almost broke apart. On January 29, under extreme pressure from New Delhi, Subramaniam agreed that the New Congress would contest only nine Lok Sabha seats (out of thirty nine) plus the one from the Tamil-speaking territory of Pondicherry. New Congressmen in the state were outraged and passed a resolution demanding the resignation of Subramaniam. Mrs. Gandhi sent New Congress President Sanjeeviah from Delhi to try to peruade Karunanidhi to make a more favourable agreement, but Karunanidhi, sensing he held the advantage, refused to even see Sanjeeviah.[61] Mrs. Gandhi desperate, decided to keep what she had and the uneasy " Progressive Front " was consolidated. Once Mrs. Gandhi joined the Front, the Right Communists her main supporters in Parliament, joined also. The Muslim League stayed with the D.M.K. The Old Congress and Swantantra were the main components of the rival " Democratic Front". The Left Communists fought alone and were wiped out.

Karunanidhi brought certain strengths to the struggle. Several Indian Administrative Service Officers, all of them anti-D.M.K., have told me that Karunanidhi has a quick mind and is an excellent administrator. And Karunanidhi, as had Annadurai before him, followed the major lines of Kamaraj's policies. The pro-Old Congress *Eastern Economist*, no friend of the D.M.K., had a special supplement on Tamil Nadu, just before the elections were called. They hailed

> the economic miracle which had been achieved. From self-sufficiency in food production, the state has an export sur-

[61] K. S. Ramanujam, *Challenge and Response*, Madras: Sundara Prachuralayam, 1971, p. 147.

> plus . . . An impressive infrastructure for a leap forward an industry has been built up over the years.[62]

It added, "There is no doubt that the present government is as much devoted to the development of the state as its predecessor."[63]

Statistics support this claim. By 1972, Tamil Nadu was to have one hundred per cent of its villages electrified. Of all the states of India, only the undivided Punjab could make the same claim. Aided by fairly good rains and also by the continuing "green revolution", food grains increased from 540,580 metric tons in 1966-67 to around 670,000 metric tons in 1971. By February 1972, grain production was at 730,000 metric tons, an increase of nine per cent a year "far outpacing the national average of four or five per cent per annum. The yield for rice . . . was the highest in the country."[64] Tamil Nadu had become the third most industrialised state in the country and retained its position as fifth among the states in annual per capita wage (Rs. 644).[65] The great surprise of the 1970 Census was that Tamil Nadu, seeming on the surface so rural, had emerged as India's most urbanized state.[66]

Perhaps most significant for the purposes of this chapter is the communications network in Tamil Nadu. Cinema theatres continued to increase. By 1972 there were 1,300 movie theatres in the state. In all the rest of India there were only 6,200.[67] An independent research group discovered that in the four states of southern India 36.2 per cent of the population was exposed to the cinema. In the North it was 8.3 per cent and in Eastern India 18.3 per cent.[68] It was also discovered that rural literacy in the South was much higher than in the rest of India and "a larger number of cinema houses are located in . . . rural areas."[69]

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[62] *Eastern Economist*, October 17, 1970.
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *The Indian Express*, 10 February 1972.
[65] V. S. Thirumalai, "Tamil Nadu," *The Illustrated Weekly of India Annual*, January 1973, p. 56.
[66] A locality is described as urban if 75 per cent of the male population of the area depends on non-agricultural resources for their livelihood and if the density is greater than one thousand persons per square mile and if the total population of the unit is greater than five thousand people. See *Census of India* 1971, "Tamil Nadu General Population Tables, Series 19, Part IIA, Madras : Government Printing Office, 1973.
[67] *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, November 11, 1972.
[68] "Operations Research Group Survey," *Promotion*, Bombay : Advertising Agencies Association of India, February 1972, p. 3.
[69] *Ibid.*

In addition to the cinema, newspapers and magazines serve as major conveyors of political and cultural ideas. The 1969 Report of the Registrar of Newspapers[70] reported that the vernacular newspaper in all of India with the largest circulation was the *Dina Thanthi*, a Tamil paper edited by S. P. Aditanar, former D.M.K. Speaker of the Tamil Nadu Assembly. In sixth place came *Dinamani* which supported the Kamaraj Congress. Of the six vernacular newspapers in India with the widest circulation, only one was in Hindi.[71] As for weekly vernacular magazines, the Tamil *Kumudum* had the highest circulation in India, *Vaarantari Rani* was in third place and *Ananda Vikatan* in fourth.[72] In 1969 the largest Hindi weekly was in sixth place. (Kerala's *Malayala Manorama* was second.)

Because the *Dina Thanthi* had overtly D.M.K. connections, it is worthwhile to examine briefly its role as political commentator and catalyst. In a privately sponsored and privately published survey that was done in 1970,[73] the *Thanthi* had a readership in Tamil Nadu in 1970 of 3,787,000 per day. Its urban readership was 1,753,000 and its rural readership was 2,034,000.[74] Among its readers, while professionals accounted for only 209,000, 1,390,000 of those labelled as " workers " read the *Thanthi*.[75]

These figures are further verified when one examines the income levels of the *Thanthi's* readers. In the group earning from 500 rupees to over 1000 rupees per month, there were 298,000 readers. But 2,484,000 readers came from income groups earning less than 200 rupees a month. Thus the rural and relatively poor read the *Thanthi*. By contrast, the prestigeous English-language *Hindu*, with a readership of 601,000, had only 152,000 in this lowest income

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[70] Government of India Office of Information, *Press in India*, 1969—13th *Report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India*, New Delhi : Government Printing Office, 1970.

[71] See Chanchal Sarkar, " What's Wrong With Our Press ? " *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, December 6, 1970, p. 3.

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] The Advertising Agencies Association of India, employed India's leading consultancy organisation, the Operations Research Group, to do this survey of communications in India. It was published in *Promotion*, the Association's trade journal. I am indebted to Mr. S. Ramakrishnan for giving me access to *Promotion*.

[74] *Promotion*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

group, only 51,000 in rural areas, and only 103,000 among "workers."[76]

The *Dina Thanthi* owes much of its popularity to its somewhat spicy content and its liberal use of cartoons and photographs. Its main appeal is its use of spoken, rather than literary, Tamil and a unique style which continually repeats certain key words. Many lower class Tamils claim that the *Thanthi* has been the means by which they learned to read. The communications network of Tamil Nadu, of which the *Thanthi* is a representation, is very important in understanding the Dravidian movement's political and ideological success. Its leaders have proved themselves to be not only master manipulators of symbols but also excellent manipulators of media.

Despite the structural development that Tamil Nadu had undergone—some due to D.M.K. efforts, some because of Kamaraj's original policies, and some just because of the energised spirit of the Tamils—the D.M.K. entered the 1971 election with blots on its record. It had failed to supply three measures of rice for a rupee. For political reasons it had granted over-generous pay increase to government workers. The 1970-71 budget had a huge deficit and unemployment, inflation, and the rate of population growth kept increasing.

Also, the meaningfulness of many of its economic reforms could be questioned, especially in the context of radical structural change. Education spread but the irrelevant content and methods of much education remained the same. Of one hundred pupils who entered the first standard, only fifteen reached the final year of high school. Thus literacy was increasing, but it could easily lapse back into functional illiteracy. While production of food grains had increased, land reforms—despite a law lowering ceilings on holdings from thirty to fifteen standard acres—were inadequate and the plight of landless (largely outcaste) labour remained serious. There had even been a tragedy in which an out caste village was badly burned and several labourers killed by caste people (not a new event in Tamil Nadu or India). Events were to prove that the electric grid, much of it based on hydroelectric power, had been over-

[76] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

extended. When the rains failed, Tamil Nadu was plunged into darkness. Most serious of all, the D.M.K. and Karunanidhi had proved vulnerable to corruption. Thus, Tamil Nadu still shared in the rest of India's problems. The performance of the D.M.K government, however, when judged by the standards of other state governments, was certainly creditable.

When the election was over, Mrs. Gandhi was triumphant on the India scene. Contesting 442 seats, she secured 63 million of the 144.5 million votes cast against 59.4 million secured by the undivided Congress contesting 516 seats in 1967. She gained 43.6 per cent of the total vote as against 40.7 per cent for the Congress in the previous elections.[77] More importantly, the New Congress secured 69 per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha. The Old Congress contested 239 seats but won only 16.[78] Of the opposition parties only the Left Communists gained, getting 25 Lok Sabha seats as against the 19 they had before the election. Regional parties, such as the Akali Dal, suffered reverses.

In Tamil Nadu, however, the D.M.K. scored an overwhelming, and to many, an unexpected success. Only Kamaraj resisted the flood, winning his Lok Sabha seat. This was the only Old Congress seat won in all of southern India. The Progressive Front won all the rest in Tamil Nadu, with 23 going to the D.M.K. and the New Congress gaining its 9 plus the one from Pondicherry. To measure the extraordinary appeal of the D.M.K. one must look at the Assembly elections. The D.M.K. won 184 of the 234 Assembly seats. Its allies in the Progressive Front accounted for all the rest except for 15 for the Old Congress, 6 for Swantatra and one for a group called the Agriculturists' Alliance. From 6,214,825 votes in 1967, the D.M.K. went to 7,610,766 popular votes, or 46.5 per cent of the total. The entire Progressive Front received just under 53 per cent of the total vote. The Kamaraj Congress fell from 41.43 per cent in 1967 (when the Congress was united) to 33.1 per cent. Its Democratic Front garnered only 36.47 per cent of the total vote. Most importantly, the D.M.K. which began as an urban party, won 123 seats out of the 138 most rural constituencies of the state. Voter turnout, however, dropped to

[77] Horst Hartmann, *Political Parties in India* (Meerut : Meenakshi Prakashan, 1971), p. xiv.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. xv.

71 per cent. This was still the highest in India. (Total turnout for all of India was 54.81 per cent, compared with 61.32 per cent in 1967).

Undoubtedly, some of the Progressive Front's success was due to Mrs. Gandhi's association with it. As *The Indian Express* commented after the election :

> It is impossible that the Indira image swayed no votes in Tamil Nadu when it did everywhere else . . . It seems reasonable to assume that the New Congress brought the D.M.K. the left-of-centre literate votes, the support of white collar workers, etc. . . . These groups would have disapproved of the Old Congress alliance with the Swatantra.[79]

The *Express* didn't say so, but it was clearly aware that the Swatantra represented not only conservative economic policies, but also Brahminic influence. One can gain a clue to New Congress strength from the fact that the Old Congress vote fell by about 8 per cent from the united Congress total of 1967. That 8 per cent was a clear gain for the Progressive Front. The results seemed to confirm Mrs. Gandhi's eagerness to have an electoral agreement with the D.M.K.

During the elections, *The Indian Express* and *The Hindu* strongly backed the anti-D.M.K., anti-Indira Democratic Front. *The Hindu*, from its earliest pioneering days under Subramania Iyer, had been associated with Brahminic Congress interests and Rajagopalachari had been their hero for years. In 1967 they had given the D.M.K. fairly favourable coverage because of Rajaji's alliance with it. In 1971 their bitterness against Karunanidhi clouded their analysis. The misleading coverage in the English-language press caused much of the astonishment among educated Tamils when the ballots were counted. For example, writing just before the election, *The Hindu's* top national columnist, G. K. Reddy, said :

> Tamil Nadu has an altogether different kind of record with a strong national as well as regional tradition and no political party can afford to let one override the other . . . The D.M.K. committed the fatal mistake of succumbing to the bait of

[79] *The Indian Express*, 20 March 1971.

> Central patronage after the Congress split . . . Even the (New) Congress has come to realise that it had erred badly in attempting to out-manoeuvre Mr. Kamaraj by aligning itself with the D.M.K. at a time when its own future was at stake, without realising that this kind of crude strategy, which might have some relevance in the backward Hindi states, would rebound in the politically more sensitive atmosphere of Tamil Nadu.[80]

This quotation, which so marvellously reveals its primordial sentiments under its sophisticated verbiage, contains genuine insights. It draws all the wrong conclusions, however. Tamil Nadu, as has been pointed out, does have strong all-India and regional traditions. It can even be said that the Tamil has experienced a tension between his sense of a pan-Indian identity and his feeling of being a Tamil. The renaissance seems to have been most fulfilled when the two were synthesised. Subramanya Bharati simultaneously stressed Tamil patriotism and Indian nationalism. Murugan appeals as a religious symbol because he has Tamil roots but also, as the son of Siva, all-India connections.

Politically, in the 1950's, Kamaraj admirably filled this synthesising role. He was certified by E.V.R. as a "real" Tamil but also was a leader of the State Congress. When Kamaraj was named president of the Indian National Congress, Tamils glowed with pride. When, however, he seemed to get too involved with the Centre, especially on the Hindi issue, he was defeated. The Congress split, in which Indira Gandhi turned against him, was disastrous for Kamaraj. Against his progressive instincts, he was forced to side with the more conservative Old Congressmen. Then, in 1971, he made the fatal mistake of allying himself with his old adversary, the Brahmin Rajagopalachari. Thus, he lost both his "socialist" and his non-Brahmin Tamil image.

On the other hand, in 1967, Rajagopalachari's embrace helped legitimise the regional Annadurai. Tamils could vote for the *kuttani* because it creatively united "regional and national traditions". What Reddy failed to realise when he wrote his article was that this regional-national tension was resolved for many

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[80] *The Hindu*, 9 March 1971.

Tamils in 1971, not only by the seemingly conservative, Brahminic, and Centrist Kamaraj-Rajagopalachari combination, but by the Karunanidhi-Mrs. Gandhi alliance. Tamil romantic nationalism was safeguarded by Karunanidhi and, at the same time, one could vote for a renewed and "socialist" All-India Congress headed by Mrs. Gandhi.

Historically, such a creative synthesis has been hard to maintain. The Tamils have continually slipped in one direction or the other. The 1971 Karunanidhi-Gandhi alliance was to be no exception. Once Mrs. Gandhi gained her two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha, the situation changed. She no longer needed D.M.K. votes at the Centre and had to build a New Congress organisation at the State level. C. Subramaniam was encouraged to act as leader of this state effort and was given Cabinet status to enhance his position.

Almost as soon as the election was over Subramaniam said that the New Congress attitude towards the D.M.K. would be to help them "in keeping up the tempo of development in the State."[81] At the same time he was careful to agree with the D.M.K. position on the primordial issue of Hindi. The major themes of the New Congress approach were sounded at a Madras City Youth Congress meeting. It called for the D.M.K. to abandon its demand for greater state autonomy and asked for "a joint attempt with the Union Government to create a favourable climate to influence its socialist programme".[82] It drew a line of difference between a progressive party and a socialist one: "The D.M.K. is progressive but not socialist".[83] On February 16, 1972, Karunanidhi formally announced the end of the alliance. The immediate cause was the Congress putting up its own candidates for a constituency in a Pondicherry by-elecion, but former Chief Minister Bhaktavatsalam, a fervid New Congressman, reflected New Congress sentiment when he said, "There was no continuing alliance after the mid-term poll . . . It was only an electoral pact for the purpose of mobilising support . . . for Indira Gandhi's leadership".[84]

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[81] *The Indian Express*, 24 March 1971.
[82] *The Indian Express*, 22 April 1971.
[83] *Ibid.*
[84] *The Indian Express*, 16 February 1972.

Karunanidhi, while defending his socialist *bona fides*, had no distinctive place to go except back to his regional moorings. The alliance with Mrs. Gandhi, which had really existed from the time of the Congress split, had brought the D.M.K. more fully into All-India affairs. The "integrative revolution" was working. The New Congress decision to challenge him on the state level brought that integrating process to an end. The earliest dramatic example of the change was seen in the Tamil Nadu Assembly's debate on Bangladesh. Karunanidhi repeated several times that he was not for secession but he expressed his anxiety that the central government should not create

> conditions for the emergence of Mujibur Rahmans in the states . . . After the creation of Pakistan the rulers in the Western wing ignored the claims of East Bengal. Only when Mujibur's legitimate demands were suppressed was he driven to the extremes of demanding total freedom.[85]

The threat was at least implied.

Karunanidhi also said that he agreed with the "political ideology" of the New Congress and that if the Centre brought forth progressive plans such as the recently passed bank nationalisation, the D.M.K. would support them.[86] However, he continued to lash out at Hindi, reminding his audiences that the D.M.K. had resisted Hindi imposition for three decades and "It would not allow imposition of Hindi on Tamilians".[87] At first, respecting the power of the Prime Minister's image, he tried to separate her from his charges. He said she had "progressive views but it was likely that Hindi zealots in the North would thwart her aims".[88] A year, later however, he was warning of "dire consequences" if "anybody tried to trample down the aspirations of the people of Tamil Nadu on the language issue. History showed what happened in Bengal when their mother tongue was ridiculed".[89]

After the Bangladesh war, which further burnished Mrs. Gandhi domestic image, posters appeared throughout Tamil Nadu, featuring

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[85] *Link*, 11 April 1971.
[86] *The Hindu*, 30 March 1971.
[87] *The Indian Express*, 23 March 1971.
[88] *The Hindu*, 30 March 1971.
[89] *The Indian Express*, 29 March 1972.

an idealised painting of Karunanidhi and calling him "the Mujibur Rahman of Tamil Nadu—he who raises the cry for state autonomy".[90] Karunanidhi linked the cultural issue of autonomy to socialistic economic development. He announced that any amendment to the Constitution to implement socialist policies would not suffice "unless more powers were forthcoming to the states".[91] The autonomy demand became the D.M.K.'s major political weapon—and a major justification by Mrs. Gandhi for breaking the alliance.

Although Congress-I (as the New Congress is now known) gained 63 Assembly seats in the 1984 elections, the party in Tamil Nadu still has no effective cadres or charismatic leaders. Congress-I relies, in the State, on an alliance with one of the feuding Dravidian parties. This feud has given the Congress-I a splendid opportunity which it has effectively exploited. The Dravidian party which enters the alliance gains from this All-India connection but it remains the more important partner.

In the 1977 elections, Congress-I aligned itself with the then-new A.I.A.D.M.K. of M. G. Ramachandran and was able to bargain for 15 Parliamentary seats and win 14 of them. The A.I.A.D.M.K. won 18 of 20, leaving the D.M.K. despite its broad support, with only 1 Parliamentary seat. Just three months later, however, in June, 1977, all the parties ran on their own for the Assembly elections. The results were extremely revealing. The A.I.A.D.M.K. won 30.6 per cent of the vote and 130 seats. The D.M.K. got 24.4 per cent of the vote and 48 seats. Congress gained only 17 per cent and 27 seats. The Old (Kamaraj) Congress, running for the first time as the Janata, obtained 16.4 per cent and only 10 seats. M. G. Ramachandran became Chief Minister. The results displayed what all keen observers of Tamil Nadu still know, the Dravidian movement is the most important cultural and political force in Tamil Nadu and Congress-I is an appendage, although a useful one, because, in alliance, it lends pan-Indian legitimacy to its Dravidian partner.

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[90] *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, November 19, 1972, p. 14. At this time other posters appeared, comparing Karunanidhi to Raja Raja Chola.
[91] *The Indian Express*, 27 April 1971.

This regional-national combination was never better demonstrated than in the 1980 Parliamentary elections. The D.M.K.-Congress-I alliance was re-established and won convincingly. Congress-I gained 20 seats, the D.M.K. 16, and the A.I.A.D.M.K. won only 2. Just six months later, Assembly elections were held and the Congress-I D.M.K. combination was decisively defeated by the A.I.A.D.M.K. Tamils feel happier with a regional party that connects up with a national party ; they can then express both their regional and All-India loyalties. When elections are just on the State level, however, they have no hesitation in choosing a regional party that runs on its own. In 1984, with Mrs. Gandhi assassinated, with M.G.R. seriously ill, with elections being held on both the State and national levels, and with the regional A.I.A.D.M.K. again aligned with the pan-Indian Congress-I, the sweeping win for the alliance was a foregone conclusion.

It is agreed by many observers that at the end of 1984 the D.M.K. has the support of from 30 to 35 per cent of the Tamils, the A.I.A.D.M.K. 35 to 40 per cent, the Congress-I 15 to 20 per cent and minor parties have the remainder.[92] Kamaraj's death has brought an end to the Old. These figures demonstrate the anomaly of Tamil politics. The Dravidian movement claims the loyalty of almost 75 per cent of the populace but in such a situation Congress-I has enormous bargaining power because victory is ensured for whichever front it joins. As 1977 and 1980 proved, however, it can only do this on the Parliamentary level. On the local level the Tamils remain stubbornly regional, and on " primordial " issues they will turn against the Centre.

Indeed, the most important factor concerning the 1971 election was not the All-India dimension. For the election turned primarily on primordial issues. That is why the attempts to " Tamilise " and " de-Brahminise " the temples and the furore surrounding the Vinayaka image were both catalysts and foreshadowers of the issues which dominated the campaign. Kamaraj might have survived the alliance with Rajaji and used it as the basis for a viable national-regional appeal. To have accomplished this, however,

[92] " Tamil Nadu—An Uncertain Future," *India Today*, November 15, 1984, p. 29. Of course, in a situation where personalities are so important, M.G.R.'s health and Rajiv Gandhi's performance, can being a change in these figures.

he would have had to prove that he was the dominant partner and also reestablish his regional credentials. This was especially true because E.V.R. was now supporting Karunanidhi's Progressive Front. Instead, for almost inexplicable reasons, Kamaraj let himself be used by his brahminic Swantatra allies.

The election began in a relatively conventional fashion. The Democratic Front stressed its two stellar personalities, Kamaraj and Rajagopalachari, in flattering photographs and drawings. They were depicted as appealing to voters to "Save the Nation ; Save Democracy".[93] They combined an attack on Mrs. Gandhi's alleged disregard for the Constitution and an attack on the D.M.K. economic record : "The poor man's food will be at stake if the D.M.K. government continues."[94] They loved to quote a hero of theirs, John F. Kennedy : "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich."[95]

The D.M.K. started off by defending its economic record, but cultural issues were increasingly stressed. A major advertisement proclaimed :

> Hindi imposition has menaced Tamil Nadu for three decades. The D.M.K.. . . .took upon itself the historic responsibility of fighting Hindi imposition. The Two-Language Resolution passed by the Tamil Nadu Legislature in January, 1968 meant expulsion of Hindi from the State. . . But the battle is far from over. The Constitutional guarantee for the continuance of English has to be secured. Eternal vigilance is the price of linguistic liberty too. . . . .[96]

Soon religion was a dominant issue for the D.M.K., A lengthy political appeal, appearing in a newspaper, was typical :

> Your culture, your language, and your identity are safe with the D.M.K. Progressive Front. . . .The minorities are our allies. The Muslims and Christians are our kith and kin. . . . The other front gives the minorities a step-motherly treatment. Under the other front this is what Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, leader

[93] See, for example, *The Hindu*, 1 March 1971.
[94] *Nathigam*, February, 1971, trans. by P. Jeyachandran.
[95] *The Hindu*, 1 March 1971.
[96] *The Indian Express*, 1 March 1971.

> of the Jan Sangh, says : 'To accept Muslims and Christians as minorities would be tantamount to making religion a permanent divisive line in politics, in economics, in fact in every walk of social life. . . . .[97]

The advertisement then quoted fiery anti-Muslim, anti-Christian statements from M. S. Golwalker, long-time leader of the militantly Hindu R.S.S. It continued :

> We are for unity. The other front is for uniformity. Surely you do not want Hindi Imperialism. So you are not for Jan Sangh. Surely you do not want exploitation of people by capitalism. So you are not for Swantatra. Surely you are not for the Princes and Maharajahs. So you are not for the Old Congress . . . .Vote for the D.M.K. Front.[98]

Romantic nationalism and radical socialism are clearly displayed here. The D.M.K. was trying to tie Kamaraj to the Jan Sangh and R.S.S. Each of these groups is miniscule in Tamil Nadu, since they represent primarily North Indian primordial sentiments. Kamaraj had actually refused to let the Jan Sangh join the Democratic Front. Therefore, it was extremely necessary that Kamaraj free his Democratic Front from these primordial attacks. Instead, he played into the shrewd and intuitive Karunanidhi's hands.

It was the so-called "Salem Incident," which brought about the very identification Kamaraj needed to avoid. This incident emerged soon after the election began and it became the major symbolic issue of the campaign, demonstrating just how important culture—and the primordial sentiments spurred by modernisation—are in Tamil Nadu. On January 24 and 25, 1971, E.V.R.'s Dravida Kazhagam sponsored, in the city of Salem, a "Superstition Eradication Conference". Such conferences had been held before when Kamaraj had been in power. This time, however, the Democratic Front and the English press seized upon the incident and fanned it. Already the Vinayaka issue and the rulings of the H.R.C.E. Board were stirring the establishment and the Salem conference seemed

[97] *The Weekly Mail*, 27 February 1971.
[98] *Ibid.*

a perfect vehicle around which earlier primordial resentments could be crystallized.

At that Conference a large number of rather earthy posters were taken out in procession. They ridiculed various Vedic and *puranic* stories about the gods. For example, Murugan, in the form of Siva's son Skanda or Kartikkeya, is said in the *puranas* to have been produced by Siva's " seed " which was cast into fire. A Salem poster portrayed Brahmin priests standing around Siva, looking as though they were masturbating him while Parvathi, Siva's wife, held her hand out. Aiyappan, the growingly popular deity to whose hill temple thousands of Tamils and Malayalis flock every year, is seen in the *puranas* as being born from Vishnu and Siva, after Vishnu assumes the form of the goddess Mohini. The D.K. poster showed a lusty Siva preparing to have sexual intercourse with an eager and clinging Mohini. A third poster, drawing from a story in the *Satapatha Brahmana*, depicted Vishnu in his *avatar* of the boar having sexual relations with a very feminine Earth. In addition to these and other posters, an effigy of the god-hero Rama was taken in the procession and was beaten by sandals. Afterwards the effigy was publicly burned.

As soon as the story was carried in the English-language papers the Democratic Front journalists joined together. K. M. Subramaniam, a Brahmin Old Congress candidate from the Brahminic constituency of Thyagarayanagar in Madras (where the earlier Vinayaka drama had been played), was editor of the paper, *Polstar*. The headlines after Salem read, " Sri Rama Shoed, Burnt. Hinduism Outraged Under D.M.K. "[99] After a colourful description of the Conference events, the article continued :

> Sri Rama is a devoutly held name in every Hindu household in this land of sages and seers. The beastly outrage committed at Salem is nothing but a savage and wanton insult to Hinduism as a whole and to the millions who have absolute faith in its doctrines and practices. . . . The D.M.K. has once again demonstrated that it is not eager to protect the sentiments of the majority community against the obscene activities of a small group of atheists. The reason can only be that the D.M.K. itself is but a loose. . . . conglomeration

[99] *Polstar*, 31 January 1971.

> of atheists and iconoclasts. If this State is to be burdened with the D.M.K.'s crude atheism and perverted rationalism . . . . .there won't be even a semblanace of law and order. Insane demonstrations and desecretations would become the order of the day.[100]

Just as the D.M.K. was tying the Democratic Front to the Jan Sangh, the Democratic Front was linking the D.M.K. to the D.K. On the same front page, *Polstar* trumpeted,

> The D.M.K.. . . .wants to destroy the traditional religious practices and it publicly preaches atheism. . . . .The D.M.K. has. . . .the audacity to recommend the post of priest as an appointment and abolish the hereditary system of priesthood. Even Mohammed Ghazni when he invaded India only broke the idols, looted the wealth of the temples, but never attempted to destroy Hinduism. . . . .[101]

Immediately, as in the pattern of the Vinayaka incident but on a vastly increased scale, "Hindu Protection Committees" sprouted throughout the state. One, the *Asthiga Sangham* ("Association of Believers"), issued a poster in which E.V.R. was beating a picture of Rama and Sita with his sandal. The poster asked "Are we to support Karunanidhi's government which encourages Periyar to do this ?" Karunanidhi seemed to lose his poise. He ordered copies of the poster to be confiscated but the Tamil Nadu High Court promptly ruled there was nothing objectionable on them.

Karunanidhi's visible disarray continued. On February 7, he made a speech defending his protection of the temples and tried heavy-handedly to reassure the Brahmins : "The D.M.K. has always safeguarded the Brahmins and their interests will continue to be safe if it is voted back into power."[102] He refuted the claim that the D.M.K. members were atheists and then listed the Brahmin Collectors he had in the state, and reminded his audience he had a Brahmin finance secretary with him when he went on his foreign tour ! He ended by saying the D.M.K. supported "a Brahmin

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100 *Ibid.*
101 *Ibid.*
102 *The Indian Express*, 8 February 1971.

woman" for Prime Minister.[103] This singularly unsuccessful speech only succeeded in underlining the caste issue.

Things were just warming up, however. On February 15 the satirical Tamil fortnightly, *Thuglak*,[104] edited by the Brahmin actor, playwright, and journalist, "Cho" (S. Ramaswamy), was seized by the Madras police, under Karunanidhi's orders, for carrying "indecent and scurrilous pictures". These pictures were none other than photographs of the Salem posters. This triggered a new round of demonstrators, including the involvement of many students with whom *Thuglak* was popular. The few copies of *Thuglak* that had been sold before the confiscation circulated throughout the state. The Democratic Front printed thousands of leaflets with the photos on them and distributed them all over Tamil Nadu. Accompanying the photos was a message :

> These are the photos of the anti-God procession held in Salem under the protection of the D.M.K. Government. The D.M.K. has been unmasked. The real faces of the Erode disciples[105] have been exposed. Should we still trust the atheist D.M.K.? Must we cast our sacred votes for them ?[106]

On February 16, Rajaji wrote to *The Hindu* :

> What has transpired in connection with the blasphemous and outrageous Salem procession indicates that the Salem magistrates should be dismissed at once . . . It would not have surprised anyone if the procession incited sufficient provocation for a murder or two on the spot. The action of the Government of Tamil Nadu against the paper which sought to expose the criminal indifference of the officials responsible for preserving order and good behaviour is a ridiculous inversion of what ought to be done.[107]

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[103] *Ibid.*

[104] Named after the Muslim ruler, Mohammed bin Thuglak (1325-1351) who developed a reputation for foolishness for, among other things, building a capital in the Deccan and then deserting it. Cho had written a drama called "Thuglak," satirising Mrs. Gandhi's government.

[105] E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker came from Erode. Thus, the D.M.K. leaders were seen as his disciples.

[106] Quoted from one of the undated leafleets. Trans. by P. Jeyachandran.

[107] *The Hindu*, 16 February 1971.

Karunanidhi responded to all of this by having a legal case registered against E.V.R. and other organisers of the conference. A top police official of Salem was also suspended. That night, Kamaraj, speaking in Tirunelveli, said :

> What is the point in taking action against the police officials when you have failed to give instruction to the District Collector and the Superintendent of Police to prevent the procession, about which you had prior knowledge . . . ? You have been hobnobbing with the Dravida Kazhagam which continues to be one of the partners of your Front. How can you expect the poor police to take action against the D.M.K. members ?[108]

This was a different Kamaraj from the one who had implicitly accepted D.K. support for several years. Increasingly, because of the speeches of the leaders of each front, the battle was being symbolically portrayed as one between the D.K. and Jan Sangh, neither one of which had large memberships in the state.

Tamil Nadu became deluged with leaflets. D.M.K. followers, for example, put out a handbill which they falsely attributed to K. M. Subramaniam, who has already been mentioned. It read in part,

> Long live Brahmanic Dharma ! Attention dear Brahminic community . . . What does the D.M.K. people's rule mean ? It means the rule of the Sudras . . . Should Karunanidhi, the Sudra, come to power again ? Should the Sudras who live in slums come to power ? . . . 'Cho' is striving hard for our Brahmanic renaissance . . . Again we must establish the Arya Dharma. In this sacred mission the Jan Sangh will also help us. To curb the Sudra, to crush the lowest *varna* . . . to get rid of the barbaric Tamil language, to raise the Aryan language Sanskrit, be united you Aryans ! Affectionately, K. M. Subramaniam.[109]

This was a forged leaflet and shows that the D.M.K. was shifting its position in response to the Democratic Front attack. Instead

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[108] *The Hindu*, 18 February 1971.
[109] Undated and no reference to publisher. Trans. by P. Jeyachandran.

of trying to appease the Brahmins, they were emphasising the primordial themes of caste and language and tying them to the modern issue of economic class differences—romantic nationalism and radical socialism. This explosive mixture was to increase during the campaign.

Ripples of the controversy were being felt all over India. A. B. Vajpayee, then a leader of the Jan Sangh, speaking in the Indian city of Indore said that Mrs. Gandhi's government had "miserably failed to condemn this shameful incident which wounded the religious feelings of millions of Hindus in the country."[110] Speaking at Surendranagar in the North, Mrs. Gandhi replied that E.V.R. had been indulging in these "pranks" since 1935 and that her party and the D.M.K. "had nothing to do with the Naicker group."[111] The first part of her statement was correct but on the same day she gave that speech, E.V.R. was urging his followers to work for victory for the D.M.K. "to give a fitting reply to my enemies."[112] Unlike the other principals, he was having a marvellous time. Noting that Democratic Front members wanted to burn his picture, he offered to sell them photographs of himself for one rupee a piece.

Things were getting more serious, however. "Cho" addressed a large meeting on the Madras Marina on February 21 and then shuttled up to Delhi to support a Jan Sangh candidate who was running there. There was an attempt by the "Tamil Nadu Hindu Temple Protection Committee' to organise a *hartal* (strike) throughout the state. It suggested the following placards be carried in processions : "Government quit the temples; Don't formulate laws against Vedic rules, Long live Hindu unity ; Temples are our lives ; The blasphemous should be punished."[113] The *hartal* was a failure, which should have shown which way the political winds were blowing. No one seemed to be paying attention, however.

On February 23, in a well publicised press conference, Rajagopalachari said he "smelt" a change of government at the

[110] K. S. Ramanujam, *Challenge and Response*, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
[111] *Ibid.*
[112] *The Indian Express*, 19 February 1971.
[113] *Thyagabhoomi*, 23 February 1971.

Centre and in Tamil Nadu.[114] He was asked why in 1953, when he was Chief Minister, he ignored E.V.R.'s breaking of an idol of Vinayaka. He replied by saying that was a small offence but the Salem incident was a major crime. "The difference between the two was like beating a man or murdering him."[115] He added that it was well known that the D.K. leader was opposed to him. "Now there was a *guru-sishya* relationship between Mr. E. V. R. and the D.M.K."[116] In that press conference, Rajaji insisted the question before them was the survival of the Constitution "not a Brahmin—Non-Brahmin issue."[117] The issue was becoming just that, however.

As the uproar increased, Karunanidhi's line kept hardening. He seemed personally offended by the attacks. He turned to open attack and his remarks seemed more instinctive than politically calculated. On February 24, the day of the abortive *hartal*, in a notable speech in the town of Dharmapuri, he asked,

> What crime have we perpetuated for them to clamour for our annihilation? That we did not have our birth in a high caste is the only sin we have committed. I was born in an ordinary family belonging to a backward community. I do not have any pride of pedigree. Is this a sin? Periyar and Anna are the only two who . . . made us regain our self-respect, made us Tamilians, and made us walk once again as men. It is a fateful testing period for us. A challenge has been thrown to Tamil society . . . Will this race survive or be annihilated? That is the question Tamil Nadu is facing. Act with that question etched in your brains.[118]

Karunanidhi then referred to Rajagopalachari's press conference and gave his own interpretation of Rajaji's remarks. He claimed Rajaji was not offended by the breaking of the idols of Vinayaka "because he does not like Vinayaka very much."[119] Rajaji, however, "worshipped Rama and so made a distinction between beating Rama and breaking Vinayaka idols."[120] The implication

[114] *The Hindu*, 24 February 1971.
[115] *Ibid.*
[116] *Ibid.*
[117] *Ibid.*
[118] *Murasoli*, 25 February 1971.
[119] *Ibid.*
[120] *Ibid.*

to his listeners was clear. Vinayaka is more "Little Traditional," closer to the common people, and Saivite, Rama is more "Aryan," "Northern," and Vaishnavite. Here was Karunanidhi, a Saivite sectarian, espousing a popular Hinduism! Whatever rhetorical flourishes he used, it was definitely not the speech of an atheist. Karunanidhi continued in an ominous vein:

> Until now there were no intercaste vendettas or religious riots in Tamil Nadu. Today, if one observes the way . . . some persons are working for the ousting of the Kazhagam . . . I am getting the jitters . . . The fear has gripped many of us whether intercaste riots which we have successfully kept at bay all these years, is going to get out of control and spread like a flood which has overwhelmed its dam and engulf Tamil Nadu.[121]

Was Karunanidhi truly concerned about such riots or was he trying to incite them? In any event, they came.

The next day at a meeting held on the Marina in Madras, Kamaraj and Rajagopalachari addressed a massive crowd. It was largely a middle-class crowd and contained many Brahmins. Rajaji gave the gathering the air of a Hindu revival meeting. He offered his "blessings to the candidates, more particularly Mr. Kamaraj". Applying *thilak* to Kamaraj's forehead, he commented that

> whatever the relationship between the Swatantra Party and the Old Congress in the rest of the country, in Tamil Nadu the two had become one. Neither in my mind nor in Mr. Kamaraj's mind is there any feeling that the two parties are separate. We have become one family like the newly married bride and bridegroom merging into one family.[122]

Rajagopalachari seemed to have conquered both Kamaraj and the Old Congress.

He then specifically raised the "Brahmin issues," by claiming that "in some quarters it was stated that some Brahmins were afraid of voting against the D.M.K. Fearlessness was a characteristic of the Brahmins and I would therefore appeal to them to exercise

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[121] *Ibid.*
[122] *The Hindu*, 26 February 1971.

their votes without any fear."[123] As I, and thousands of others, left that meeting, gangs of slum-dwellers poured out of the alleyways that line Pycrofts Road near the Marina and pelted the crowd with rocks, stones and Tamil Nadu's own special "grenades"—full sodawater bottles. It was a frightening and dangerous scene. Blood poured from the faces of women and men, groans and shouts filled the air, and the pavement was littered with sandals, glass, and missiles. When the police arrived, they drove the crowd back. This major instance of violence was reported only by *The Hindu*. No other newspaper or magazine mentioned it. Fear was very present in Tamil Nadu.

The next day Karunanidhi addressed a street meeting. He continued the hardened line of his Dharmapuri speech. He warned that "some big newspapers were sowing the seeds of communal discord . . . and . . . paving the way for caste riots for which they alone would be responsible."[124] He specifically added, "These newspapers are blacking out the achievements of the D.M.K. government only because I do not belong to a high caste."[125] Recalling the tension that existed at the time of the rise of the Justice Party and Self-Respect Movement, he warned the papers, "not to wake the sleeping tiger."[126]

On March 7, less than a week before the election, a bizarre touch was added to the Salem incident. The popular All-India journal, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, appeared with an article titled, "Banned in Tamil Nadu."[127] The article carried several of the photographs that had appeared in *Thuglak*, a picture of the cover of the confiscated issue, and a prominent photo of "Cho." The *Weekly*, which prides itself on its sophistication, did not limit itself to a discussion of the issue of freedom of the press. It went on to trumpet,

> Has even God to be at a discount in a secular state? The so-called Anti-Superstition procession taken out at Salem was a real affront to millions of Hindus and to their sense

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[123] *Ibid.*
[124] *The Indian Express*, 27 February 1971.
[125] *Ibid.*
[126] *Ibid.*
[127] "Banned in Tamil Nadu," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, March 7 1971, p. 38.

> of duty, dignity, and discipline, the three precepts by which the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam swears for advancement of the ruling party in Tamil Nadu.[128]

The article tied in the three statues of E.V.R. which had been unveiled by Karunanidhi in 1969 and 1970. These statues, it will be remembered, have atheistic slogans on them.[129] Needless to say, Karunanidhi did not attempt to ban the powerful *Weekly* but the All-India exposure tended to confirm the elite, in all of India, in their conviction that the Democratic Front would be victorious in Tamil Nadu. As the *Weekly* coyly put it, " The Salem incident is bound to have repercussions in the mid-term elections."[130]

It did have an effect, but one far different from what the elite expected. Even the D.M.K. never expected to win such a sweeping victory. In the perspective of Tamil history and with a recognition of the power of primordial sentiments (and with much hindsight), what happened seems clear. In the last three weeks of the campaign, when Karunanidhi seemed to act out of a genuine sense of having been personally wronged—attacked for his background—he struck a responsive chord which resonated deeply in the Tamil psyche. Kamaraj, on the other hand, had allowed himself to become the " bride " of Rajagopalachari ; the populist Old Congress had let itself be conquered by the Brahminic Swatantra party. Even worse, the minuscule Jan Sangh had become symbolically pitted against the indigenously-rooted Dravida Kazhagam. In short, the Salem incident became a Brahmin—non-Brahmin issue and an " Aryan "—" Dravidian " issue. When the great mass of Tamils had to choose between these symbolic alternatives, there was no doubt which way they would go. Rajagopalachari had been rejected in 1953 on caste grounds. It was unlikely that, in the highly politicised Tamil Nadu of 1971, he would be embraced. And although Karunanidhi, unlike Kamaraj, always dominated his Front, Mrs. Gandhi's presence lent popularity and pan-Indian legitimacy.

Because of the passions aroused by the Salem incident, Mrs. Gandhi's presence was not as important as it had been at the begin-

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[128] *Ibid.*
[129] See Chapter IV.
[130] *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, March 7, 1971, p. 38.

ning of the election. The price paid for the campaign waged by both sides was that the Tamils had turned more inward. The move toward more All-India involvement had been, to some extent, reversed. As the masses of low-caste and lower class Tamils continued their entry into history, they viewed Karunanidhi as a symbol of their aspirations. His angry rhetoric spoke to them and for them. The D.M.K. election manifesto read in part :

> The D.M.K. takes a solemn pledge to provide increased facilities . . . to the peasants toiling till their sweat drips to the earth, the industrial workers . . .the laundry workers and other sections of the proletariat and those who are suffering at the lower strata of society . . . The D.M.K. is the servant of the society and . . . a lamp unto your own home.[131]

In the minds of many Tamils, the Salem incident served to emphasise this message.

After the elections were over, Karunanidhi reiterated that the government would not tolerate " harmful anti-God activities in public " and he regretted that the Salem issue had been "exploited" for election purposes. " The gods themselves," he said, had been annoyed by this and " have caused the Democratic Front to lose all the seats in Salem District."[132] Despite the humour, he had changed. Or, if not changed, he had more self-confidence. No longer did he try to follow the conciliatory liberal, model of Annadurai. By the end of the campaign, he had increasingly turned toward his other leader, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker. Much of Naicker's style, so much a part of the young Karunanidhi, returned to the fore. For example, on April 25, in a major speech, he mentioned that " though the D.M.K. did not believe in sectarian politics one or two communities somehow rallied solidly against the D.M.K. under the leadership of Rajaji and Kamaraj."[133] Since Rajagopalachari was a Brahmin and Kamaraj a Nadar, all of Tamil Nadu knew he was referring to the Brahmins and rapidly rising Nadars. In this quotation, of course, he was indulging in the very " sectarian politics " he publicly deplored.

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[131] " Manifesto of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam," *Handbook of Election Manifesto* 1971, ed. Vadilal Degli, Bombay : Commerce Ltd., 1971, pp. 163-4.

[132] *The Indian Express*, 16 April 1971.

[133] *The Indian Express*, 26 April 1971.

At the commemoration of Annadurai's sixty-second birthday, Karunanidhi clearly demonstrated his post-election style. He had been infuriated by a comment of the brahminically edited but popular Tamil magazine, *Ananda Vikatan.* In an editorial, the magazine commented that Karunanidhi's victory had been won by the popularity Annadurai had earned for the D.M.K. It added that the D.M.K. was only celebrating the birthday because it was to Anna that the victory was owed.[134] Karunanidhi was enraged because the editorial made it seem he was still dependent on the departed leader. His fury showed in the speech :

> The *Ananda Vikatan*, with that uniqueness which belongs only to Brahmins, has written that we celebrate Anna's birthday only when we are in power . . . But we celebrated . . . when he asked us to go to prison . . . when he ordered us to accept tortures with a smile . . . when he continuously conducted the war of revolution . . . The Brahmin's intention is to topple the Kazhagam government and to attack Karunanidhi by repeating the name of Anna . . . Don't we know how many empires you people have overturned in this way ? Don't we know how many governments have come down by your acts of conspiracy ? The day you entered through the Khyber Pass, from that day onwards, how many empires of this country have been brought down ? . . . Periyar raised the war flag to fight against you. Anna approached this problem in a soft manner telling us, ' Don't be too hasty ; let them vomit their poison'. Nevertheless, those serpents raise their heads . . . You may ask why I haven't taken any action. The time will come. Wait ! This is my answer.[135]

There could be no greater proof of the power of the " Dravidian Great Tradition". Primordial sentiments were not fading ; indeed, they were resurgent. Any attempt to separate Brahmins from Brahminism had been, at least temporarily, abandoned. The traditional scar in the historic syntheses that compose Tamil culture had been broken open again. When the Karunanidhi-Mrs. Gandhi political alliance disintegrated, this cultural schism was intensified.

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[134] *Ananda Vikatan*, 3 September 1971.
[135] *Murasoli*, 20 September 1971.

Thus, the intra-state and state versus Centre tensions led to the same result—an inward-looking Tamil Nadu and a reemphasis on Tamilisation. It was against this background that the imposition of the "Emergency" took place in 1975. In 1977, as has been pointed out, Mrs. Gandhi entered an alliance with the new A.I. A.D.M.K. One of the reasons for the success of that alliance may well have been Karunanidhi's hardened line. Tamils prefer to be regional *and* national.

Even under the most adverse circumstances, the cultural processes of Sanskritisation continue to operate. Real Tamilisation also means Sanskritisation. Although Karunanidhi had moved closer to Periyar he continued to reject the kernal of the old leader's message—his positivistic atheism. Months before the 1971 election, Karunanidhi gave a representative quotation which expressed his mellower, more liberal, ethos and world view. The speech was made to the *Tamil Deivika Peravai*, the association of non-Brahmin Saivite *maths*. Presiding over the meeting was Kunrakkudi Adigalar the *acharya* (or as the Tamils prefer it, *adigalar*) of the Kunrakkudi *math*. He was also a member of the upper house of the Tamil Legislature, and a D.M.K.—appointed member of the H.R.C.E. Board.

Karunanidhi emphasised that "at no time had the D.M.K. been a party of atheists, but it would not allow exploitation in the name of God".[136] Referring to an article in a *Peravai* publication on the importance of temples for inculcating a sense of devotion, he said the D.M.K.'s approach in this regard might differ. The D.M.K. believed "that God lived in the hearts of men rather than in temples." He added, "The real issue is not whether the D.M.K. accepted God but whether they conducted themselves in a manner acceptable to God".[137] This speech was entirely consistent with what Karunanidhi had been saying from the earliest days of his association with Annadurai and it echoed the sentiments of the departed leader. It is probably a more true expression of Karunanidhi's views than the angry comments after the election were.

More than a year after the election, Karunanidhi demonstrated both his solidarity and his differences with Ramaswamy Naicker.

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[136] *The Indian Express*, 21 August 1970.
[137] *Ibid.*

He also showed his continuing contempt for Brahminic and strongly orthodox Hindu practices by opening an exhibition of "art" which was a part of the huge Rationalist Conference he later addressed. The exhibition consisted of a series of posters depicting E.V.R.'s career : in 1953 the breaking of Vinayaka idols ; in 1955 painting out Hindi signs and burning the national flag ; in 1956 burning a picture of Rama, etc. There were echoes of the Salem Conference. A portrayal of erotic temple sculptures was next to a sensuous cinema poster. The caption read : "If you can have sculptures like this, why not posters such as these ?" A caricature of Nataraja, the dancing Siva, had Neil Armstrong, the astronaut, landing on the crescent moon that adorned Nataraja's hair.[138]

Karunanidhi, with E.V.R. sitting on the platform, began his speech by emphasising his continuity with the old leader :

> Today, here in Madras . . . we are sitting together with emotion and enthusiasm, trying to plan what constructive work to do in the future. To discover the first chapter of this episode, one has to go back forty years when Periyar started his strenuous journey. Before that, Tamil Nadu was being lashed by the (Sanskritic) . . . storm of orthodoxy. Even as Tamil Nadu was under the grip of these destructive forces and was sinking slowly in the quagmire of irrational beliefs a spark of light set out . . . and that light is Periyar. Anna stood solidly behind Periyar in these ideas . . . And we, coming in the same ideological tradition as Anna, are doing as much as we can for the cause of rationalism while we run the government.[139]

He then attacked aspects of popular Hinduism, beginning with what he called the "obscene" sculpture in "a small temple near my mother's village". He continued,

> Whether I accept religion or not, the point to be analysed is why there is so much obscenity only in our religion. In the other religions they have become, to use Anna's expression, "ex-gods." But in our religion they refuse to be ex-gods . . . In other religions we observe that there is a trend toward

[138] *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 18 June 1972, p. 23.

[139] M. Karunanidhi, "Speech to the Rationalist Conference in Madras," May 27, 1972, *Viduthalai*, 8 June 1972.

> one God. But we have the capacity to expand everything. The thirty million gods have by this time multiplied into forty million . . .[140]

Having established his legitimacy, however, Karunanidhi's differences with E.V.R. became glaringly evident :

> I assume that when Periyar introduces the doctrine that there is no God at all, he is really saying, 'There is no God at all,' only as a technique. Only if it is said there is no God will people accept just one God. If the mother says, 'There is not even a single piece of candy for you' to the child which asks for fifteen pieces, the child would ask, 'Mommy, at least give me one' . . . Similarly when Periyar says that there is no God, he means, "Have one and be done with it."[141]

At this point in Karunanidhi's speech, Periyar waved his hands in objection. And the D.K. audience shouted, "No, No." But Karunanidhi didn't flinch. He continued,

> Friends, I do not at all oppose those who say, "There is no God at all." But as far as I am concerned, and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam is concerned, even at the time we were with Periyar the cinema *Velaikari* was released. In that cinema Anna said, "One God and one community." We have not changed from those ideas.[142]

There are many such examples of Karunanidhi's links with tradition. If one remembers his insistence on "one God" at the Rationalist's Conference and then looks at a speech he made three months earlier at Palani, a fascinating conclusion can be reached At Palani, a major Murugan temple, he said,

> God is everywhere ; he is in the mind of the one who works for the poor. The D.M.K. says this. It has given rehabilitation to beggars. God may live in Palani, Madurai, and Kanchi. But the place where he most truly lives is in the minds of those who light the lamp in the houses of the poor . . . Palani is a significant spot in Tamil Nadu. "Murugu" means

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140 *Ibid.*
141 *Ibid.*
142 *Ibid.*, this quote, of course, echoes Tirumular's famous line.

> beauty. The one who was that beauty is Murugan. The ancient Tamils worshipped only that beauty. Our culture is that there is only one caste and only one God. Tamil scholars . . . should do research and tell the people that Murugan is the only God in the Tamils . . .[143]

One can discover in Karunanidhi much that is anti-Hindu and anti-Brahmin, but his position is not atheistic. Like that of Annadurai, it is much closer to Pattirahiriyar and the *siddars* than it is to atheism. And unlike Annadurai's world view, there seems to be a hint of Murugan *bhakti* in Karunanidhi's ethos. An enlightened social ethic, an expression of *anbu*, is linked to a theistic emphasis on one God and that God is identified, at least in this quotation, with the popular Murugan. As was said by Singer, the D.M.K. has helped " propagate a cultural ideology and model of a Dravidian Great Tradition " but, contrary to Singer, the alternate models that it uses are part of a long tradition of Tamil regional Hinduism. This regional Hinduism draws on both the Little Tradition of Village Hinduism (the ancient hill god Murugan) and the Great Tradition of All-India Hinduism (Murugan remains, for most Tamils, Subramaniam, the son of Siva). It is not an alternative " Great Tradition " but an example of a vibrant regional Hinduism.

The effect of the D.M.K. on Tamil regional Hinduism has been to rationalise it, lessening the influence of village Hinduism and strengthening vertical geographic spread in Tamil Nadu. However, because the Dravidian movement utilises symbols which, while providing Tamil Nadu with a distinctive ethos, have also linked the Tamils with the rest of India, the age-old process of Sanskritisation is also proceeding, even though this is not the aim of the Dravidian movement.

143 *Dina Thanthi* and *Malai Murasu*, 15 February 1972.

CHAPTER VII

REPRESENTATIONS OF TAMIL HINDUISM

It appears that the chief legacy of the Dravidian movement is not positivistic atheism or even an easy-going secularisation, but an anti-Brahminism (not anti-Brahmin) coupled with an age-old Tamil tradition. This combination of an assertion of equality and a deep devotionalism has brought forth a renewed and reformed populist *bhakti.* From the roadside shrines of the rickshaw pullers to the elaborate and emotional *bhajanams* of the Madras elite, this *bhakti* is present in every nook and cranny of Tamil Nadu. The outward signs are the *vibhuti* and *kunkumum* on the forehead, the *kasikoir* (thread) round the wrist, and the garlanded icons of gods and goddesses adorning shops, homes, trains, buses, and restaurants. Doubtless these outward signs point to much that is sterile and traditional but they also are symbols of an inner devotion whose content has often become renewed or transformed.

It should be remembered, however, that even in 1872, Charles Gover had written of a 'silent revolution' in the religious culture of non-Brahmins in South India :

> Every Hindu below the Brahmin caste chooses his sect... He promises unhesitating obedience to the *guru* who is seldom a Brahmin.[1]

He added that the Tamils

> do not absolutely reject the ordinary *puranic* system—that is...the Brahminic traditional system...There has been no open break between the old and new systems...[2]

Gover's perception of a popular Saivism, consisting of sects centred around *gurus*, and existing alongside Brahminic Hinduism, seems correct. Annadurai and Karunanidhi, as had many figures before them, did attack *puranic* Brahminic and

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[1] Charles Gover, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.
[2] *Ibid.*

temple practices. The contemporary Non-Brahminic sects and *gurus* also occasionally engage in this attack, but more often they utilize *puranic* stories as vehicles for both tradition and reform. While retaining the themes of traditional Tamil *bhakti* with its stress on *anbu* and *arul*,[3] these sects reflect and further Tamil romantic nationalism by centring themselves around a deity with Tamil connections (especially Murugan, but also Aiyanar or Ayyappan) or local goddesses and by emphasising regional experiences and sentiments in ritual and teaching.

This chapter will examine the content and ethos of this populist Tamil *bhakti* by examining two representative *gurus*, one who has been directly related to the D.M.K. and another tied to the pan-Indian regionalism represented by Kamaraj. Neither of these figures is as important in the 1980's as in the period covered by this study but both are still active and new regional *gurus* continue to arise.

Perhaps the personality who is most closely identified with Saivite *bhakti* and the D.M.K. is Kunrakkudi Adigalar. The head of one of the non-Brahmin Saivite *maths* in Tamil Nadu, this Adhenakarthar's full title is Thavathiru Deivasigamani Arunachalar Desika Paramacharya Swamigal. He is known as Kunrakkudi Adigalar because of the village where his Adheenam is located. He was active in organising the Tamil non-Brahmin *maths* into a more active force and in excluding the Brahmin Saivite *maths* from the association (the *Deiviga Peravai*). His closeness to the D.M.K. can be amply documented. He was appointed by the D.M.K. to the upper house of the State Legislature and he actively influenced the powerful Hindu religious and Charitable Endowment Board. Strongly evangelical, after the 1967 D.M.K. victory, Kunrakkudi was influential in having the *Deiviga Peravai*, through the H.R.C.E. Board, print copies of the *Tirukkural* which were distributed at the graduation

[3] Rudolf Otto, writing fifty years ago about traditional South Indian *bhakti*, identified three ideals which undergirded it. "1—Salvation is attainable not only by those who are capable of deep and intricate thinking but also by the 'poor in spirit'... 2—Salvation is not attained as a reward... but as a gift of grace by a saving power... 3—Salvation is bestowed upon man... through *bhakti* (that is) through attachment and devotion in love and faith..." Rudolf Otto, *Christianity and the Indian Religion of Grace*, Madras: Christian Literature Society for India, 1927, p. 7.

ceremonies of Madras University. At a conference for temple trustees, held under the auspices of the H.R.C.E. Board, he emphasised the need for training young men for spreading the Hindu religion throughout the country.[4]

During the 1972 D.M.K. schism, *The Illustrated Weekly of India* ran an article on the split. R. G. Krishnan, a Tamil Brahmin, wrote the article. "As we waited to be ushered into the presence of (D.M.K. Chief Minister) Karunanidhi," he wrote, "we were surprised to see a man in saffron climbing down the stairs. What did a *sannyasin* have to do with a politician who reviled orthodoxy ? We were told he was Kunrakkudi Adigalar, the head of a *math*, and much respected".[5] The fact that Krishnan did not know of him perhaps accounts for his acceptance of this flattering characterisation. Kunrakkudi is extremely controversial because of his political activities, but that is all the more reason to have an intellectual glimpse of him. This brief analysis will not examine the gossip that flows about him, as it does about any controversial figure. It also will not evaluate the many social service activities that his *math* sponsors. Rather, it will concentrate on some of his ideas and interpretations, especially those which illustrate the ways he consciously and unconsciously relates Tamil traditions to the Tamil present. My information has been gained from some of his writings, from some personal interviews, and from watching him at some meetings.

It is useful to describe briefly one of these meetings. On February 27, 1972, Kunrakkudi spoke at a function in the beautiful hill station of Ootacamund. The meeting was organised by a group known as the "Friends Forum". The Forum was a D.M.K.—oriented organisation of lower middle-class civil servants who officially cannot be related to political movements. The group, about fifty to seventy-five men, felt its main function was to "educate" the community and so Kunrakkudi, was invited to speak. He agreed, but was paid well for the speech and was put up in a good hotel.

[4] *The Indian Express*, 24 September 1973.
[5] R. G. Krishnan, "Karunanidhi or M.G.R. ?", *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, November 19, 1972, p. 13.

The Forum had rented (for a reduced fee since their connection with the governing party was well known) a cinema theatre for the Sunday morning talk. On that cold morning, more than three hundred people attended. Kunrakkudi was in great form. He was then around fifty years of age, had a flowing beard streaked with gray, and had piercing eyes. This rather stern exterior was mellowed by his smile and his wit. He spoke in faultless contemporary Tamil.

He began by criticising the invocation—a song based on words by Namakkal Ramalingam, one of the 'pan-Indian' members of the Tamil renaissance. The song mentions Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam, as well as Tamil. Kunrakkudi objected to the song because he felt it divided Dravidians into four groups. He said that Tamil was the mother of the other three languages and that "Aryan conquerors" had been responsible for their division, with Sanskrit entering into them in different degrees. Now it is necessary to recreate their former unity. "If that is not possible," he said, "at least their division should not be celebrated."

He also told an amusing story. Two high school football teams were playing a rough, close game. Suddenly a player had an opportunity to kick a goal. But he paused and looked at his coach for direction before he kicked. A member of the other team, utilising that moment, stole the ball. Kunrakkudi compared that pause with a type of prayer. "We do not have to ask God what to do when our duty is clear to us and we have the means to accomplish it. Prayer must be left for those things over which we have no control. For the main business of life, men must get on with their obvious jobs. If they stop and pray about those, their opportunities will be lost".

These two anecdotes, the criticism of the prayer song and the football story, serve to highlight Kunrakkudi's romantic nationalism and its connection with the third of Bellah's "primordial identities"—religion. This relationship is made much more explicit in many of Kunrakkudi's writings.

> Tamil, of all the languages of the world, is the most fit for the feeling of piety. Songs which melt the heart are only in Tamil. In the field of religion we have much ancient

> fame...The Tamil religious creed is very ancient, but due to the nature of its philosophy, it shines as something new, not as a dead relic. Our religious creed has the ability to fulfil (or satisfy) even the new *Siddhantas* such as Marxism.[6]

The latter part of this quotation shows how religion can be utilised to ease the way into modernity. The philosophy of a past golden age is also new and modern. By returning to the old, one really becomes new—or by adopting the new, one becomes his original self.

Another primordial sentiment, language, was also stressed in this quotation.

> One can forget anything in this world, but one cannot... forget one's mother-tongue. To live using a language other than one's own is like walking with an artificial leg. Just as any race...protects its own language, we Tamils too...should safeguard Tamil civilization by protecting Tamil thought and feeling...Only then can we rise to the heights as Tamil children and great people following the way of Tamil.[7]

The reference to "race" brings up another primordial sentiment and again it explicitly interrelates with religion.

> Great *Vedas* would have appeared in Tamil but they were destroyed or disappeared due to the tidal waves of the sea and earthquakes.[8] Only the wealth of *Tirumurai* help us today. This wealth too has been covered and concealed. Some concealed it fearing that their life of dominion over us could be shaken if that treasure were known... If the *Tirumurais* had been destroyed when hidden, what would have been our plight now? But how can they, who felt themselves superior because of their abundance of philosophy, now degrade us with words?[9]

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[6] Kunrakkudi Adigalar, *Talk at Trichy Conference* (Madras: Kunrakkudi Math, 23 September 1970), pp. 3-4.

[7] Kunrakkudi Adigalar, "At Pathular," *Speeches in Ceylon*, Madras: Kunrakkudi Math, January 1968, p. 22.

[8] A reference to the "lost continent" theory mentioned in Chapter III.

[9] Kunrakkudi Adigalar, *Speeches in Ceylon*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

It should be clear that Kunrakkudi does accept the contemporary world view and ethos of the Dravidian movement. In conversations and speeches he reiterates that Aryans and Dravidians are separate races, that the Dravidians of Mohenjo-daro and of Tamil Nadu are the same, that Brahmins are Aryans who (like the tribes which destroyed the Indus Civilization) continue to pollute and degrade Tamil culture.

In looking at Tamil history, Kunrakkudi had no hesitation in choosing the two figures who he most admires and with whom he most identifies. One is Tiruvalluvar, author of the *Kural*, and the other is the *Nayanmar*, Appar. I shall write about his approach to the latter and ignore the former, except to say that he sees the *Kural* as a Saivite book, following a long company of thinkers who see their own philosophy mirrored in that eclectic work.

In his comments on Appar, many of Kunrakkudi's major themes came forth. He began by stating his disagreements with Ramaswamy Naicker. In an interview, he told me that he greatly admired E.V.R. for his social reforms but disagreed strongly with his atheism.[10] He has written, "It is my firm belief that the great Appar is more qualified to make social reform than people like Ingersoll, Plato and Socrates. If one wants to reform something he must have faith in that thing."[11] Then, in describing Appar, Kunrakkudi indirectly described the way he sees himself. "People like Appar accepted the old tradition and then bridged the old and the new."[12]

He looked at the founding of Tamil temples and discovered that the ancient Tamil Kings made mistakes which hurt the growth of Saivism. First the kings paid for the building of the temples. "Because of this it was not possible for the people to think, This is our property. We must take care of it. We must weed out the bushes that grow around the walls and *goparams*." (One reason Kunrakkudi admires Appar is because

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[10] Interview with Kunrakkudi Adigalar, Kunrakkudi *math*, Tamil Nadu, 6 June, 1972.

[11] Kunrakkudi Adigalar, *Appar Virundhu* (*Appar's Feast*), Madras : Pannai, 1970, pp. 2-3.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

of his hoe and the physical service it symbolises. He takes groups of youths around Tamil Nadu to clean up temples). "People began to feel that the temple belonged to the trustees. But the trustees just tried to make profit from it."[13] The second mistake was that the kings gave the temples lots of property. "If the temples and *maths* have a permanent source of income then they are not concerned whether or not the people visit them...Our Appar thought that the religious institutions should be...run in relation to the people."[14]

Kunrakkudi's social critique then became more specific. "It was the rich that brought our religion down in the middle ages. Religion forgot its duty to speak for the poor... But our Appar, who lived in the seventh century said, 'God is the guardian of the deserted...' "[15] Kunrakkudi continued this theme:

> Man gets much from the society, but he is shy in his repayment... We must give much to the society...This is the goal...of kind men... Appar harshly condemns empty ritual... (He) emphasises that we must realise God is everywhere. He lives in every living thing. So we must love all living things...But what is going on now ? We pay many honours to God but we let human beings roll in the dust and suffer like insects caught in the drain. Yet these poor people are the property, the abode, the reflection of God.[16]

Kunrakkudi also quoted Appar to show that he opposed caste divisions.[17]

Kunrakkudi then became even more "radical socialist" and in relating Appar to this stance he engaged in what many might

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 23, "O mean men
Who talk elaborately about the Sastras.
What can you do
With your class and gotras ?"

believe to be fanciful exegesis. He quotes Appar's famous *bhakti* verse :

> Like the faultless vina,
> And the evening moon,
> The blowing Southern breeze,
> And the fragrant spring,
> Like a bee-haunted pool ;
> Like all these is
> The shade of the feet of my Lord.[18]

Then he wrote that " all these are common property," " so all, at the feet of the Lord, should be able to enjoy everything equally. No economic level, or religion, or race, or language, should gain more enjoyment than another."[19]

He has an admiration for Karl Marx, telling me once that " only Marxism could equal Saiva Siddhanta in its social concern,"[20] although he carefully added that he was not a Marxist. A picture of Lenin hangs on his wall, next to one of Tiruvalluvar. In the article on Appar, he wrote, " even people like Karl Marx, who desired economic revolution, said that if the wealthy didn't give money, one should snatch it from them. Appar speaks with this egalitarian economics in view.."[21]

Kunrakkudi closed this essay on Appar by writing,

> Appar said beautifully and emphatically in the seventh century whatever we consider modernity and modern thoughts in the twentieth century. Let us engage ourselves in the task of making a society based on service where people live harmoniously with love, with no difference of wealth, caste, or clan, which is what Appar in the seventh century wanted to see.[22]

Again one finds the traditionalising of the modern—or the modernising of the tradition—which distinguishes the effective reformer, " bridging the old and the new."

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[18] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8.
[20] Interview, *op. cit.*
[21] Kunrakkudi Adigalar, *Appar Virundhu*, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-7.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Much more could be written of Kunrakkudi's treatment of these themes, and of others, but this should set the tone or *ethos* of his thought. One cannot leave his beloved Appar without one last comment, however. He has further popularised some lines of Appar's which are important to the Dravidian Renaissance. They have often been used in language or in other disputes with the North :

> Bound to no man are we ; Death hath no terror for us, nor can horrid hell hold us ! Illness and pain shall be alien to us ; We shall not bend our knee to insolent might ; We shall forever dwell in joy and feel sorrow no more.[23]

Before leaving Kunrakkudi it may be worthwhile to examine a bit more closely, the content of his world view. This examination will demonstrate his continuity with the Saivite tradition, but also show some of the changes he rings on that tradition.

> Souls are always desiring something... But as far as desire is concerned we have to adopt just one thing--a limit. Just like anything else which requires a fence or a limit...there must be a limit...for desire also. When man's feeling of desire exceeds...the limit, calamity befalls...Man is compared with a monkey...But the monkey has a far higher place than some men today... (The monkey's) natural act is to jump from branch to branch. When it jumps from one branch to another, it does so only after leaving the previous branch. But a man of limitless desire doesn't leave the previous thing when getting hold of another. He wants to hold on to everything. Because of this limitless...desire, he is subjected to many sufferings... It is better to say, "Set a limit to your desire," than to say, "Exterminate desire," because as far as man is concerned, a desire is something that cannot be rooted out...We must desire to live protecting love and virtue. We must desire to safeguard

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[23] Kunrakkudi used this in his February 27 speech. The translation is by R. Rangachari in *An Anthology of Indian Literatures*, ed. K. Santhanam, *op. cit.*, p. 579.

> the unique nature of Tamil Nadu... Because ancient Tamil Nadu lived according to the principle written in the Kural that "They alone are joys which flow from the virtuous life," it was great and culturally eminent. In order to grow in love and to protect virtue in the heart, religious life is necessary. There must be a principle... for human life... When a maṇ achieves good conduct and an attachment to a principle, that mental quality which cares for others is cultivated. That mental quality gives a nature which enables one to live not only without causing sorrow to others but also to endure the sorrow caused by others.[24]

Despite variations, his theme is constant; Tamil regionalism joined to a practical and social religion. Whatever may be said of him, Kunrakkudi has actively supported some strong measures in line with his beliefs. He wanted stronger controls for *maths* and temples through the H.R.C.E. Board (but he objected to the D.M.K. naming atheists to that Board). He has fought for *archanas* to be given in Tamil and he bemoaned the Supreme Court decision which effectively reversed the D.M.K. attempt to have non-Brahmins as temple priests. Speaking of this decision, Kunrakkudi gave me his giggle and broke into English, "The operation was a success but the patient died."[25]

Kunrakkudi Adigalar does seem to be helping the Tamils in the important and always unfinished process of reformulating identity symbols. His writings and influence are direct evidence of a revitalised and reinterpreted regional Hinduism. And he has been effective precisely because he does combine tradition with modernity.

Stout and bald, Kripananda Variar is a Saivite *bhakta* in his late seventies who travels around Tamil Nadu, and to other Tamil enclaves, in an indefatigable cycle of activity. He was born in the small town of Kangeyanallur, near the city of Vellore. Kangeyanallur has become his headquarters and he

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[24] Kunrakkudi Adigalar, *Speeches*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9ff.
[25] Interview, *op. cit.*

has done much to restore the temple there. His father was a well-known middle caste Tamil scholar and musician and Kripananda received his early education from him. Married at the age of nineteen, Kripananda moved to Madras where he continued private study, learned to play the *veena* under the famous Thenmaden Varadachari, and began to lecture in the age-old style of the *kalakshepam*, or holy discourses.

Murugan became his special deity and he became deeply attracted to the fifteenth century Murugan *bhakta*, Arunagirinather. Kripananda has composed several commentaries on Arunagirinather's most famous work, the *Tiruppuhal*, which, as was pointed out in Chapter II, is in praise of Murugan. Madurai Sami Ayer, a Brahmin and head of the well-known Saivite *math* in Madurai, became Kripananda's *guru*. Madurai Sami was a famous scholar of the *Tiruppuhal*. Kripananda claims that from the day of his initiation he has, while remaining happily married, practised absolute celibacy.[26] In addition to his study of Arunagiri's works, he has intensively explored the *Tirukkural*, the *Thevaram*, Kambar's *Ramayana*, and other Tamil classics. Through his discourses, Kripananda raised substantial sums for the renovation of several temples and for the founding of several charitable schools. It was at Vadalur, however, the last resting place of Ramalingaswamy, that he made his greatest single contribution. In 1950 he raised over four hundred thousand rupees to rebuild Ramalingaswamy's *Sathya Gnana Sabha* and he established a school for studying philosophy there. It was also at Vadalur that he founded his journal *Tiruppuhal Amirtham*, which continues to be published. It consists of commentaries on Tamil Saivite works, with a special emphasis on Arunagirinather.

When Swami Kripananda was young, the recitation of *kalakshepams* was seen *as an activity which* had become degraded. Intellectuals tended to sneer at it. Kripananda led the renascence of this mode of discourse and became Tamil Nadu's most popular *kalakshepam* teller. He has received the blessings of the Brahminic establishment, gaining titles from Kanchi

[26] Interview with Sri Kripananda Variar, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, 27 May 1972.

Sankaracharya, from the Jeer of Ahobila *math*, and from Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh. Journalistic defenders of Hindu orthodox, such as Bombay's *The March of the Nation*, and Madras' *The Hindu*, have praised him in almost identical terms. Said the first, "To a very great extent Variar's incessant preachings are responsible for stemming the D.M.K.'s anti-God campaign in the South."[27] In 1966 *The Hindu* commented,

> If the tidal waves of atheistic propaganda which swept the shores of Tamilian traditions and tried to erode the minds of the public a decade ago can now be said to be halted, the success must be attributed to our religious leaders...and exponents of classics...Among the...band of front-ranking evangelists who still continue this crusade against ignorance and irreligion is Sri Kripananda Variar.[28]

While claiming "politics should be kept separate from religion,"[29] Kripananda was closely associated in the popular mind with the Kamaraj Congress. When Annadurai died, Variar was physically attacked by an angry D.M.K. group when he said the people who were flocking to Madras to the funeral would only view "a dead body" and they were also "dead bodies". This was because he considered Annadurai to be an atheist. He often appeared at functions where such Kamaraj stalwarts as the motion picture star Sivaji Ganesan performed.[30] When Kamaraj died, Variar gave a speech full of sorrow and praise, and one which constrasted sharply with his comments on Annadurai:

> Kamaraj is no more. His soul, however, is still living in this world with another type of body which is not visible to our eyes...Many people say that if one dies the soul has gone with the wind...But while the body of Mr. Kamaraj has gone, he is still living. He can go

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[27] *March of the Nation*, 2 April 1966.
[28] *The Hindu*, 23 October 1966.
[29] Interview with Kripananda Variar, *op. cit.*
[30] At the City Entertainment Art Festival in Madras on March 2, 1972, Ganesan inaugurated the function and Variar presided over it. *The Hindu*, 3 March 1972. Today, Ganesan is a supporter of the New Congress and so finds himself in alliance with his old rival, M.G.R.

> anywhere he likes...and see anything...Mother India may take a thousand years to give birth to another such son...After Gandhiji, he is the one and only political leader who is always in my heart.[31]

Kripananda belongs in the ranks of those members of the Tamil renaissance who seek to combine pan-Indian commitment with a loyalty to Tamil traditions, as did Kamaraj himself.

My first glimpse of Kripananda Variar was at a *kalakshepam* he was performing before a vast throng of middle class merchants and low class urban labourers. The function had been paid for by the Nadar merchants, but there was no denying the universal appeal of Kripananda's message. The crowd sat in the street for hours, following every word. His musical training stood him in good stead since songs formed an important part of the discourse. He was as able with an intricate but lucid pun as Karunanidhi or Kunrakkudi. His *forte* is parables where his sense of humour, his eloquence, and his evangelistic passion combine in a popular mixture. Later I saw him in a more sober setting. He was discoursing in a temple on Arunagiri's *Kantharanupathi*, but even then he injected much humour into his talk.

Kripananda spends as much time as he can serving as *guru* to extended families who have chosen him. Most of these families are relatively prosperous middle caste groups and they are often self-employed in traditional businesses. Seeing him at a Deepavali celebration in such a home, I was able to gain a greater sense of the private devotion of the *swami* and of his interaction with these families. He always carries with him images of Murugan and Murugan's two wives, Deiviga and Valli. Each day, Kripananda spends at least two hours performing an elaborate *puja* to the images. Unlike some popular *swamis* and *adigalars*, he does not engage in "miracles" to enhance devotion. While he is ascetic, he seems to enjoy the good food, the automobiles, and other conveniences placed at his disposal by his upwardly-mobile followers.

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[31] Kripananda Variar, 3 October 1975, trans. S. Chidambaram, to whom I owe the quotation.

Finally, after a long association with him through some of these families, I engaged him in a long interview.[32] My Dravidian movement friends claimed he was a puppet of Brahminism and so I asked him about the role of Brahmins in the religious life of Tamil Nadu. His answer surprised me. He said that in the early days, Brahmins literally lived for others. Their domination was a domination of the spirit. But they became selfish "so the people hate them." He accepted the Annadurai distinction between Brahmins and Brahminism—the practicing of exclusiveness. Furthermore, he felt in Tamil Nadu the problem had been intensified because "Tamil Brahmins were so enamoured of Sanskrit that they had no affection for Tamil." That increased the Tamils "hatred" of them. He was quick to add, however, that he felt no antagonism towards Brahmins. One was left with the impression that in contemporary Tamil Nadu he just did not consider the Brahmins to be very important.

Pushing him on his philosophic stance, I asked him how he reconciled Sankara's non-dualism (*advaita*) with the devotional and dualistic (*dvaita*) Saiva Siddhanta which he preached. Variar simply said he disagreed with Sankara.

> Sankara's *advaita* is impractical; it is beyond experience. *Saiva Siddhanta* offers a practical view which has meaning in the light of our experience. We know that God is one but we also know that souls are many. Hurdles [*pasa*] are present but they can be removed by the devotion [*bhakthi*] of the worshipper and the grace [*arul*] of God. Once this happens souls become pure. They can merge, as rivers merge into the ocean, but even after the merger the rivers remain and are still rivers.

The swami is clearly a strong *Saiva Siddhantin* and shares in the more practical religion of Kunrakkudi.

I wanted to know how he viewed Murugan's relationship to Siva. He replied that they are the same and used this meta-

[32] Interview with Kripananda Variar, *op. cit.* All the following quotations come from this interview.

phor : " Siva is the jewel and Murugan is the shine of the jewel." Murugan, he felt, was a useful symbol of popular devotion. " A child will give us everything if we ask him to. Murugan, as the child of Siva, will give all of his blessing and grace to us if we will only ask." Thinking of Karunanidhi, I asked if the *swami* worshipped Murugan because he was an old Tamil God. Variar replied, " No, I worship him because of his relation to Siva." For Kripananda, and for many other Tamils, Murugan can bridge the gap between regional and pan-Indian loyalty. Murugan has unique Tamil connections, but he is worshipped as the son of Siva—a pan-Indian deity.

Knowing of the *swami's* love of parables, I requested one story which best illustrated his world view. The parable he chose went as follows :

> A king had an infant son who was stolen by thieves. The son grew up thinking he was the son of robbers. One day, years later, while the king was hunting in the forest, he recognised his son. Deep in his memory, the son also realised the king was his father. He left everything and followed the king.

Kripananda explained that all souls are part of Siva. Our senses are the thieves who steal our souls from Siva. But Siva's grace recalls our memories to what we really are. When we experience grace we must drop everything and go to Siva. There is communion of the soul with Siva, but not union.

In many writings and speeches, Kripananda has elaborated the content of his message and in so doing he has often implicitly illustrated his approach to the Tamil-pan-Indian dialogue. He accepts the Sanskritic concepts of *samsara* and *karma* and combines them, as does all Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, with a dualistic outlook. In the souvenir published at the time of his sixtieth birthday, he wrote an introduction entitled " My Heart." This is one of many examples of the intermixture of Tamil and Sanskritic elements one finds in Tamil *bhakti*.

> Every living being desires to live without suffering... Among all sufferings the primary one is the suffering of

> birth... We get born because of our actions. Therefore we should fear to sin. Right from my childhood, I developed this fear of rebirth. This fear came through the grace of God and by the same grace I attained the courage to shun sin. Do not think God is only in the temple. He is always in our hearts... He is in our thoughts, deeds, and words. Appar says, "The One who is in the mouth, the mind, and the thought that dwells in the mind"... So our thoughts, deeds, and words should be pure... Manikavasagar says, "I am tired of being born"... Now we must attain non-birth. I pray to my father Siva who is without birth and death for this state of non-birth... So every person should feel God is living in their hearts; refrain from sinning in the light of his grace; and do good works without expecting any reward. Then he can do away with the sufferings of rebirth.[33]

Kripananda Variar calls upon Appar and Manikavasagar but he chooses very different themes from those of Kunrakkudi Adigalar, even though both are Saiva Siddhantins. Kripananda has the same love for Tamil that Kunrakkudi has, but despite his limited knowledge of Sanskrit, he has an appreciation for it also. This is a marked contrast to Kunrakkudi. Lecturing on another Arunagirinather work, the *Kanda Alankaram*, before a largely brahminic audience in Madras, he could point to a stanza in which Arunagirinather prays to Murugan to be blessed with a desire to sing the god's praise in purest Tamil:

> Paradoxically, this particular verse contains more Sanskrit words than Tamil. The saint's intention is apparently to juxtapose tongue-twisting Sanskrit words with the mellifluous Tamil words. This shows that while there is nothing wrong in praising God in any language, Arunagiri favours Tamil because of its simplicity and purity.[34]

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[33] Kripananda Variar, *En Ullam*, Madras: Mani Vizhla Malar, January, 1967, pp. 3-4.

[34] *The Hindu*, 1 March 1972.

In the same series of discourses, however, he could acknowledge that Arunagirinather creatively blended Sanskrit and Tamil in his writings and claim that Lord Siva gave mankind these two languages : " The former could be linkened to a gem-set necklace and the latter to a pure gold chain."[35]

Despite their differences in styles and the fact that one exemplifies a solely regional emphasis and the other a regionalism within a pan-Indian context, there are the similarities in Kunrakkudi and Kripananda that one would expect in two Saivites who are products and catalysts of the Tamil renaissance. A famous parable of Variar could have been spoken by the *adigalar*. In the parable Kripananda spoke of ancient times when there were great poets in Tamil Nadu, supported by Tamil kings and chieftains. There was once a miserly king, however, who could repeat any poem after hearing it once. He had a servant who could repeat it after hearing it twice and a servant girl who could do so after hearing it three times. Poets came to the king's court and he informed them that he would give them an amount of gold equal to the weight of the palmyra leaves the poem was written on if the poem was original. Otherwise, he'd give them nothing. Poets came and recited their verses but the king would say it was another's composition, and to "prove" it, he would quote the poem back. Then he would have his servant say it, followed by the servant maid.

One day a great poet heard of the king's trickery and composed a poem with many complexities and full of difficult words. He arrived at the court and recited the poem. The king was unable to repeat it and so offered the gold equal to the weight of the palmyra leaves. The poet replied that he had thought of the poem when there were no leaves around so he had carved the poem on a rock which was ten feet long. He had the king look out of the door where two bullocks hauled the huge rock. The king stood by his word and gave the poet the gold equal to the weight of the stone. Thus, the king became a pauper. Variar ended the story by saying, " The king of

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[35] *The Hindu*, 3 March 1972.

poetry defeated the king of the land, took all the gold and gave it away to the poor."[36]

The ethos of this story with its evocation of the *Sangham* age, of poets and patronage, its glorification of poetry over political power, and its emphasis on social and moral justice, is common to both of these contemporary Saivite spiritual leaders. One is also reminded of the themes of Bharati Dasan and Karunanidhi and the parable could form the basis for a highly popular Tamil motion picture script!

Like Kunrakkudi Adigalar, Kripananda Variar links continuity and change, memory and receptivity, and helps reformulate identity symbols. An examination of these two human metaphors puts some content into the egalitarian *bhakti* that seems to be the main heir of the Tamil awakening. In the midst of Tamil Nadu's "social-psychological revolution"—its "entry into history"—religion is playing an active role. These contemporary interpreters of Saivism, despite their differences, reflect and catalyse Tamil Nadu's ongoing quest for identity. Both *gurus* have strengthened a regional Hinduism, but in the symbols they choose they also enhance the processes of Sanskritisation. Their activities, rhetoric, and philosophies complement and supplement those of the Tamil awakening's political leaders.

[36] Kripananda Variar, *Katturai Kanigal*, Madras: Tiruppukazhamirtham Kariyalayam, 1969, pp. 15-6.

CHAPTER VIII

CHIDAMBARAM: THE CONTINUING QUEST FOR MEANING

In Chapter One it was pointed out that the *Gemeinschaft—Gesellschaft* paradigm has often been interpreted as a chronological, linear model. Thus, many social theoreticians have been led to a "progressive", evolutionary theory of modernisation. Milton Singer, M. N. Srinivas, Clifford Geertz and Robert Bellah have—most of the time—liberated themselves from this constricting view. The concept of primordial sentiments especially undermines it. Yet the effects and echoes of this sequential device live on. The world is still apparently moving inexorably and inescapably from community to society, from tradition to modernity, from folk culture to urban, from the magical to the rational, from the particularistic to the universal, and from the religious to the secular. In the many variations of this theme there is always one constant; as *Gesellschaft* grows stronger, *Gemeinschaft* withers away. It is all very straightforward and non-paradoxical.

This dichotomous and unambiguous model pops up in the most unexpected places. For example, there is the anthropologist-historian Bernard Cohn, whose sensitive writings have helped so many students of India and who has been utilised in this study. In his admittedly brief, *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization,*[1] Cohn writes of "Views of the Past," stating correctly that

> the past for an Indian...is a living past that can be recalled for an individual or a group in a ritual or non-ritual context attaching him to large groups and to the civilization through a widespread mythic past or tying him to a limited group and to one place.[2]

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[1] Bernard Cohn, *India : The Social Anthropology of a Civilization, op. cit.*
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Cohn implicitly distinguishes three levels on which mythic-ritual pasts are established: (1) "the great traditions of India...connected with the spread of Sanskritic civilization over the subcontinent"; (2) "local traditions" involving "particular families, lineages, and segments of castes"; and (3) pasts "tied to one region"[3]. One finds here the Great Tradition, the Little Tradition, and Srinivas' regional spread.

In addition to these "ritual mythological pasts," Cohn sees another "direct social-political past" emerging.

> During the last 100 years another kind of past has been developing... Individuals and groups... have been formulating, codifying, and diffusing a past... more akin to the kind of past that modern Americans and Europeans have—one which is identified not with a social segment or a region but with a nation and the people in the nation conceived as a unit.[4]

He then describes this new and modern past which "many educated Indians carry with them today." He closes the chapter by asserting that this new past

> is built onto and is slowly penetrating the myriad other kinds of past, direct and mythological, carried by the bulk of the Indian population. How rapidly this new total view of the Indian tradition and *the* Indian past will supplant other local pasts is a matter of conjecture. It is clearly tied to the spread of literacy, education, and mass communications as well as to the maintenance of a unitary political system in the present nation-state of India.[5]

As long ago as April 1961, in an important article entitled "The Pasts of an Indian Village," Cohn wrote that "a society is modern when it does have a past, when this past is shared by the vast majority of the society and when it can be used on a national basis to determine and validate behaviour."[6] There, as in the later work, he states that because of regional and caste differences Indians do not yet share such a past.

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[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 51-55.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 54.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 59.
[6] Bernard S. Cohn, "The Pasts of an Indian Village," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, No. 3 (April, 1961), pp. 241-49.

Thus, a new pair is added to the old *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* dichotomy. Now we have a " ritual-mythological past " of diffuse groups and a " direct social-political past. . . identified not with a social segment or region but with a nation." A " modern " people have the latter and, eventually even in India, the former pasts will be " supplanted " by the latter.

Yet, the *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* dichotomy is only useful if it is seen in concurrent rather than sequential terms. The relationship is dialectical rather than dichotomous and often the two strengthen themselves not at the expense of each other but in conjunction with one another. With modernisation, relationships of a new complexity may emerge, but the desire for community can remain and is often deepened. Regional sentiment can grow at the same time that national feeling is strengthened.

At the very end of *Islam Observed*, Clifford Geertz presents a provocative but very abbreviated glimpse of two young men who he uses as metaphors for the present-day religious situation in Indonesia and Morocco. As a way of summarising this study, and of depicting the contemporary religious culture of Tamil Nadu, this final chapter will offer a living person as a human metaphor. Like Geertz's examples, he is not typical (or ideal typical) but representative and he sums up and embodies much of the history of his times. He shall also be utilised to refute the unambiguous progressive, evolutionary *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* model.

His name is Chidambaram and he is a member of the Nadar caste.[7] As a *jati*, they were formerly known as Shanars, with the Nadars being the more wealthy segment of the caste. Their traditional task was tapping the palmyra trees for the sap which can be made into toddy (*kallu*). This was considered defiling work and so they were low on the *varna* scale. They were placed in an ambiguous position between the " Sudras " and

[7] See Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, *op. cit.*, for one of the few contemporary accounts of this caste.

Untouchables. Even in the early years of this century they were often not allowed entry into most temples.[8]

They have risen rapidly, however, and Chidambaram's extended family is a good example of Nadar social mobility. His grandfather made money by moving from the family home in the town of Virudhunagar (then Virudhupetty) to the ancient trading and temple city of Madurai. He then lost most of the small fortune he had gained. Chidambaram's father and uncles, however, built a small wholesale grain and spice trade into a thriving business. Today there are shops in Madurai and Virudhunagar, an oil pressing mill in Virudhunagar and other investments. One of Chidambaram's cousins has become a doctor, another an engineer, and several are attending college. Chidambram was the first in the joint family to gain his Bachelor's degree and, while he is intelligent, the adjustment to the strait-jacketed and English-oriented studies of the university syllabus was difficult for him.

Born in 1938 in Virudhunagar, his earliest memories were of the exciting days of the freedom struggle. Change has been a part of his life. It was when he was seventeen, however, when he left Virudhunagar to attend college in Madurai, that the pace of life became faster, the changes more evident. Despite his boredom and frustration with most of his studies, Chidambaram had his own intellectual life. He was a part of the generation that was caught up in the first blooming of D.M.K. oratory. D.M.K. leaders often visited the college, giving, in their "new" Tamil, lectures on ancient "love marriages" of the *Sangam* period, on the glories of the Tamil past, on the ethics of the *Tirukkural*, and on a host of other topics which combined radical socialism with romantic nationalism.

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[8] In addition to Hardgrave's recent book, the fascinating history of the Shanar-Nadar *jati* can be traced in Edgar Thurston, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, pp. 363-78. In 1849 Bishop Caldwell when a young man, wrote of their lives. Later his writing caused a major stir in the rapidly mobilising caste. Thurston in 1909 said that it "was written when he was a young and impulsive missionary and the publication of which I believe that the learned and kind-hearted divine lived to regret." (*Ibid.*, p. 374). Many Shanar-Nadars did become Christians and Caldwell commented that they adopted the orthodox Brahminic tuft when they converted to Christianity, thus combining Sanskritisation, modernisation, and Christianisation !

Their comments on brahminism evoked a ready response in Chidambaram. His was a heritage of religious change. His grandfather, whom he greatly respected, had worn a sacred thread, claiming the Nadars were *Kshatryas* by *varna*, who had been degraded long before by Brahmins. Soundarapandian Nadar, an early leader of the Justice Party, became a hero to his family. Soundarapandian argued for the rejection of the sacred thread and for the Nadars performing their rituals without the aid of Brahmin priests. More than any other caste, the Nadars accepted the practice of Self-Respect Marriages.

In 1956, in his second year at college, Chidambaram was involved in his first riot. That was the year of the reorganisation of state boundaries and Madurai students violently protested the award by the central government of the regions of Peermade and Devicolam to neighbouring Kerala. Kamaraj was Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and students disliked what they felt was his surrender to the Centre. Chidambaram was afraid to tell his father of his involvement in the riots. When Kamaraj, a Virudhunagar Nadar, had become Chief Minister, Chidambaram's father and uncles had become extremely dedicated Congress followers.

Chidambaram's extra-curricular life also included the cinema. One Sunday morning he saw a rerun of Karunanidhi's controversial *Parashakti*. He was enamoured of Shivaji Ganesan's acting and he agreed with the iconoclastic message of the film. While most of the motion pictures he saw did not contain the cutting critique of *Parashakti*, even an inconsequential picture such as *Iruvar Ullam* confronted Chidambaram with change. In that film Shivaji Ganesan played a diletante who was always being chased by pretty girls. Finally he fell in love with a proper young lady and married her. She, however, refused to consummate the marriage until she was certain he had ceased his pursuit of other women. This was a far cry from the ideal of Tamil womanhood held aloft by Kannagi in the ancient epic, *Silappadikaram*, who was venerated because she remained loyal to her husband no matter how infatuated he was with the dancing girl Madhavi.

Near the end of his college days, Chidambaram saw a motion picture called *Kaanalnir*. The plot was inconsequential, but the songs were by the talented Tamil lyricist, Kannadasan. The title song especially haunted Chidambaram :

> If God has created beauty, why did he create chaos also ?
> If God has created language, why did he create dumb mutes ?
> If God has created eyes, why did he create the blind ?
> If God has created light, why did he create darkness ?
> Nobody knows from the past to the present
> The numerous *Sastras* do not give an answer
> Life is filled with questions and humanity has grown
> up with them—
> So we are born on earth, just to live among questions.[9]

Kannadasan had been deeply influenced by the D. K. in his formative years, but the ethos of this song, and of many others that he has written, differs from E.V.R. and even from Annadurai and Karunanidhi. An existentialist *angst* tinges the verses ; one senses sadness coupled with yearning. For Chidambaram, these verses opened new depths in him, increasing his restlessness, and eroding his newly-won faith in " reason ".

Chidambaram's awakening to complexity and ambiguity increased. Partly, of course, it came because he was growing older. But as his D.M.K. got more involved in the struggles for political power, its reforming message seemed, to Chidambaram, to become somewhat blunted. His family's loyalty to Kamaraj began to make sense to him. Above all, Chidambaram found himself caught between family obligations and his utopian dreams, between the reality of deeply rooted social ills and the equally harsh realities of the difficulties of reform.

In his final year of college, he was asked in a somewhat unorthodox English class to write, along with two other students, a short story. The story revealed much of the world view and ethos of Chidambaram and of his generation of students.

> He is a *dhobi* and every day he goes to the temple to wash the beautiful garments of the god. He has only two

[9] Kannadasan, *Kaanalnir* (" Mirage "), trans. E. Annamalai.

> *dhoties* and two towels but he washed the clothes of the god which are brilliant, beautiful, and ornamental. He is the man who is responsible for changing the dress of God every day, he not changing his one and a half yards of *dhoti* for a week. But, alas, he is in the lower ranks of society and those who bribe God to get a ticket for the so-called "heaven" are said to be in the upper ranks of society. "He should not touch God"—this is the unique, wonderful, and absurd rule of the society. But if he refuses to touch the clothes of the god a 'divine', 'heavenly' bad smell like that of hydrogen sulphide will spring from the god! Thus, he who is with flesh and blood helps that 'stony he' who has neither flesh nor blood. This half-naked man prevents "God" from becoming full-naked.

One sees clearly the influence of Naicker and of Annadurai on this story. Perhaps there are also echoes of the *Sangam* and the *siddars*. Antagonistic to formal religion, desiring social reform, identifying with the lower classes, this composition reflected the mind of many non-Brahmin students of Chidambaram's generation. Yet one finds in the story a note of irony, a growing awareness of the jagged edges of life, that gives the essay different ethos from the writings of Ingersoll or Naicker, or maybe even of Annadurai.

This increasing sense of *anomie* was not resolved by Chidambaram through the acceptance of an existentialism or of an increasing secularisation. It was the old tradition of Tamil *bhakti*, renewed by forces of modernisation, which came to his rescue. After his college days, Chidambaram went to work in his family's business. Caught up in the household rituals, he began to perform his own *puja* every morning. A key moment came on a Saraswati Puja day when he and the family and a crowd of other relatives and friends went to a small temple, called Saturagiri, in the western hills of Tamil Nadu. Nearly seventy people were in the group, including about twenty women. The god at the temple is a form of Siva named Sundaramahalingam. His consort is Valli Amma, often thought of as one of the two wives of Murugan.

A letter from Chidambaram best describes the experience.

> I was singing very wonderfully with immense pious... Suddenly one of the ladies got in a trance and waded through the crowd from the back to the front. She told me "I am Valli Amma, sing to me!" Seeing this the crowd got a kind of pious fear. But I raised my voice and praised her in my song. She was laughing and laughing. It was the laugh of a saintly creature... I sang my own song about the hill temple. She was full of bliss and asked me to sing about Siva. But the husband of the lady got so much afraid and asked me to stop the songs. I have no desire to stop. But it is a problem of a husband and wife. So I have to stop my song. She said, "No, I will not go until he sings further". They said, "No we will not allow further". Then she suddenly laid down and began to sleep. After half an hour she woke up and asked everybody where she was...God only knows what had happened to her and where she had been. It is a miracle and I was weeping all the night...I hate the people who stopped the *bhajanams*...Even now God is very ready to come into us but it is we who are responsible for preventing him...[10]

Chidambaram clearly experienced "a direct personal confrontation with the numinous," to use Geertz's words. This direct encounter, needing no priestly or institutional intermediaries, allowed him to accept an old Hindu—and Tamil—tradition and still retain many of the iconoclastic views gained from his early D.M.K. days. At the moment of confrontation, Chidambaram was freed from all social restraints, but, even in the midst of the experience, *dharma* raised its head in the presence of the husband and other members of the group. For Chidambaram, *bhakti* and *dharma* are not harmonious elements comprising different facets of Hinduism but rather, facets

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[10] The pioneering missionary scholar, J. N. Farquhar, described *bhakti* in terms very similar to Chidambaram's: "*Bhakti*...is a surging emotion which chokes the speech, makes the tears flow...and often leads to hysterical laughing and weeping by turns, to sudden fainting fits and to long trances of unconsciousness." See J. N. Farquhar, *Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

poised in sometimes agonising tension. In this particular example *dharma* won, as it usually does, but Chidambaram had been changed. He had found an anchor for his identity and that anchor rested deep in tradition.[11]

Dharmic responsibilities awaited Chidambaram. At twenty-six he was old to still be unmarried, especially for a member of the Nadar caste. He had resisted marriage, but after the Saturagiri encounter, he compromised with his parents. He agreed to marry if he could choose the woman, and he further agreed that she must be a Nadar. He went faithfully to the Mariamman Temple in Virudhunagar for several days until he saw a girl to whom he was attracted. Discreet enquiries established that she was a Nadar and unmarried. Chidambaram's father was a bit upset because her family was relatively poor and so could not pay much dowry. One of the major reasons he had let Chidambaram go to college was that the B.A. commanded a higher dowry in the education-conscious and commercial Nadar community. This marriage was highly preferable to no marriage at all, however, and the wedding—a "Self-Respect" one, normal for the Nadars—was held amidst great fanfare. It has been a happy marriage: five children—two sons and three daughters—came rapidly. His wife knows her husband well, however, and fears that some day his passion will dissolve in *bhakti* and he will accept the path of renunciation.

After the Saturagiri experience, Chidambaram became deeply committed to Siva-Murugan and began participating in many *bhakti* sessions. He even made the arduous pilgrimage to the increasingly popular Ayyappan shrine at Sabarimalai, in the hills between Tamil Nadu and Kerala. This pilgrimage is preceded by a long period of renunciation and discipline. Those who go from themselves into preparatory groups and engage in lengthy *bhakti* sessions. Chidambaram was so impressed by the journey that he named his second son after the place of pilgrimage. Chidambaram, as do most Hindus, speaks of

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[11] For a discussion of *bhakti* and *dharma* in conflict and in harmony, see Louis Dumont, "World Renunciation in India Religions," *Religion, Politics, and History in India*, The Hague : Mouton, 1970.

his religion in terms of a hierarchy, but it is not the hierarchy of the *varnashrama dharma*. For him, there are four levels of religion. First is the type practised by many unreflective people; seeing divinity in a stone image and worshipping it. Second, there is the level of following a ritual in a temple, church, or mosque. Third is the religion of ethical action preached by great moral teachers such as Christ, Mohammed, Swami Vivekananda, or Valluvar of the *Tirukkural*. Finally, there is the experience of *bhakti*, of true bliss brought by the devotional experiencing of the sacred. This is the most meaningful level of religion. If one feels *shakti*, the power of the holy symbolised in Southern Saivism by the feminine consort of Siva, then this is proof of a genuine relation to the divine. There is hierarchy in this viewpoint but this experiencing of all *shakti* is open to all persons. As with the *bhakti* of the Nayanars or Alvars of the *Bhagavatha Purana* or of *Saiva Siddhanta*, it can be a source and catalyst for the equality of persons. Not surprisingly Chidambaram greatly admires Kripananda Variar. His father gives generous contributions to the Swamy and often has him in his home.

Chidambaram's political pilgrimage reflects his spiritual one. In the 1962 elections, the first in which he could vote, he felt torn between his former D.M.K. loyalties and his growing Congress commitment. He was registered in Virudhunagar rather than Madurai, however, and this made his choice easier. K. Kamaraj, the Chief Minister, was from Virudhunagar and was the local candidate. The fact that he was felt to be anti-Brahmin and Nadar helped Chidambaram to vote for him. Thus, he and his family were united politically. In 1965 some of Chidambaram's younger cousins were involved in the anti-Hindi rioting. With Kamaraj in Delhi, as president of the All-India Congress Party, Chidambaram also felt a great loyalty to the pro-Tamil cause. In 1967, however, he was devastated by Kamaraj's loss to P. Srinivasan, a former classmate of Chidambaram's who was a non-Nadar and the D.M.K. candidate. Chidambaram never liked Mrs. Gandhi, however, and felt it was Kamaraj's association with the North which had defeated him. When the schism between Mrs. Gandhi and Kamaraj came, Chidambaram's loyalty to Kamaraj further

deepened. He viewed Kamaraj as a representative of the pan-Indian Old Congress and also as a Tamil non-Brahmin. With the demise of the Old Congress, Chidambaram has voted unenthusiastically for the Janata Party, which he feels carries on the traditions of Kamaraj. He finds hope in Rajiv Gandhi, however, and may become a Congress supporter again.

Chidambaram leads a busy life looking after the family's interests but he occasionally takes his wife and children to the cinema on a Sunday afternoon. One Sunday a few years ago, when the D.M.K. was in power, they saw *Savale Samale* (" Meet the Challenge ") starring Shivaji Ganesan. It was a pallid heir of the rationalistic socials of ten years earlier. Now that the D.M.K. was ruling, the Kamaraj Congress was attempting to utilise the cinema as a weapon against it. Shivaji played the role of a farm worker leading his fellow labourers in a battle against a local landlord. He, of course, fell in love with the landlord's daughter but she refused to let him touch her. Shivaji sang a sarcastic song to her entitled *Todade* (" Don't Touch "). The words of the song were written by the same Kannadasan who had so affected Chidambaram in his college days. Like Chidambaram, Kannadasan had moved away from the Dravidian movement and closer to the Congress. The final verse of the song went as follows :

> The man who digs gold, can't keep it,
> The man who safeguards *dharma*, can't have socialism
> The man who builds the temple, isn't allowed to enter,
> You belong to the crowd who enforces this ; I am not surprised.[12]

Chidambaram liked this song. His urge for social reform has remained strong and the lyrics confirmed his belief that the Kamaraj Congress was the vehicle through which to accomplish it. The song also contained a note of anti-orthodoxy.

Another Sunday, in 1970, the family saw a motion picture that Chidambaram especially remembers. With the decline of the " rationalistic socials," there had been an increase in " mytholo-

[12] Kannadasan, " *Todade*," *Savale Samale*, trans. by E. Annamalai.

gicals"—pictures which have a religious tinge. A. P. Nagarajan, a noted director, was the major figure in this revival of devotional films. He was also once associated with the Dravidian movement but had turned toward the Congress. He often used Shivaji Ganesan as his leading star. The first big mythological he directed was called *Thiruvilayadal*, which recounted the exploits of Siva drawn from the *Periya Puranam*. The film that Chidambaram especially liked was entitled, *Tirumalai-Tenkumari*. It related the story of a group of Tamils making a pilgrimage by bus to many of the leading temples of South India (from the temple at Tirumalai to the temple of Tenkumari—another name for Kanyakumari). The motion picture was filled with songs praising the gods and goddesses associated with the temples the pilgrims were visiting. These songs are modern *bhajanams*. One of these, written by Tenkanchi Bharatisami, was dedicated to Murugan and one verse communicates the ethos of the new mythologicals :

> I put up a dais in my thoughts,
> Made Murugan dance on it.
> With words of pristine Tamil,
> He made me sing.[13]

The *bhakti* renewed and transformed by the Tamil renaissance (and which renews and transforms that renaissance) is expressed through songs such as Bharatisami's. They are a merger of age-old *bhakti* traditions and a romantic nationalism centred around primordial sentiments. This particular song celebrated Murugan, a symbol who has served in the past both to synthesise Tamil and pan–Indian loyalties and to represent a more exclusive regional pride. The entire film, combining the ancient practice of temple pilgrimage with the modern technology of bus transport and excursions portrayed an inextricable mixture of *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* elements.

When Chidambaram heard the song he remembered how Siva-Murugan had made *him* sing, letting him experience the numinous through *bhakti*. The film, however, confirmed his

[13] Tenkanchi Bharatisami, "Murugan," *Tirumalai-Tenkumari*, trans. by S. T. Baskaran.

Tamil loyalties, both to land and to language. In the motion picture, as in past mythology, Tamil Nadu was not only a political entity but a sacred one. Chidambaram continues to undergo his "social-psychological revolution," but it is a transformation which allows him to be receptive to new ideas and to change, but which combines this openness with a sense of continuity, of memory, and of identity.

Before leaving Chidambaram, it will be helpful to view an event in which he was involved. This occurrence wove together the strands of his quest for meaning and also distils and summarises the thematic threads of this study. To discuss the event one final metaphor must be introduced. This metaphor, however, is not human but sacred and, as befits this *shakti*-filled symbol, she is feminine.

About two miles northeast of Virudhunagar nestles a small village named Chinnamuppanpetti. Today it is populated almost entirely by low caste fortune-tellers called Muppanars. On the northeast corner of the village, facing open fields, is an imposing whitewashed stucco structure. An arched entrance, with Tamil letters spelling out 'Pitcharamman,' faces the main village street. Inside is a large paved courtyard ending in a series of steps which go up to a small red and white striped shrine. Behind the shrine is a large flatroofed building, within which are two spacious rooms, an ample kitchen, two bathrooms and latrines, and a water pump. Within the well-kept shrine, which despite its lack of ostentation is clearly the centre of the complex, rests a square stone about one foot high, two feet wide, and three feet long. Usually a garland is draped over this *pidam*. Hanging in the rear is an old stone lamp and recessed into the wall are two small shelves containing *vibuthi* and *kunkummum*. On the floor, secured by chain and lock, is a brass vessel with a slot in the top, obviously meant for offerings of money. There is no image, but this is the abode of Pitcharamman, the *kuladevi* (clan goddess) to the two Nadar extended families which trace themselves back to the patriarchs, Uthandan and Kadalaikaran. Chidambaram is related to Uthandan.

The goddess is the focus of this clan's myth of origin and serves—as Cohn correctly wrote of many low caste origin myths

—as an accounting of the Nadars' depressed caste status, allowing them to claim a high status which had once been theirs. The family myth goes as follows: Sometime in the early 1700's (everyone is vague about the date and it seems of little importance to them) a wandering group of honey and grain traders, using bulls for transport, left the forested hills of Kollimalai near Vellore to come to that growing commercial town. Before leaving their hills they put into a clay pot some handfuls of earth (*pindinarmal*) from beneath the shrine of their goddess Pitcharamman. This pot of earth travelled with them. From Vellore they drifted by way of Karur to Trichinopoly and some settled in the town of Uraiyur, taking some of the earth to bury beneath a small shrine. Because they were traders, they took the caste name of Chettiar, a "high-middle" business caste. Others continued south, aiming for Trivandrum.

One day torrential rains began and the Trivandrum-bound group headed for a slightly higher rise of land. The rain fell for three days and nights and the waters rose. They prayed to the goddess, promising her that they would settle in that barren place if she would save them. The rain stopped and five of the families did settle there. They dug a hole in the ground, placed most of the earth from Kollimalai in it, and covered it over with a stone platform. They soon centred themselves in the growing town of Virudhunagar where they became, associated with, and took the name of, the trading Nadar caste. According to this version of the story, the low caste toddy tapping Shanars are a different group from the trading Nadars and it was the evil Vellalas who spread the rumour that Nadars and Shanars were the same. Nadars are seen as *Kshatriyas* which upper castes debased.

Three of the families took a bit of the remaining earth from the pot and set up a Pitcharamman shrine in Virudhunagar. But the two families, whose patriarchial heads were Kadalaikaran, also known as Malaiyan, and Uthandan kept their loyalties with the spot where they had taken refuge from the rain. Later, when a village began to grow nearby, the family bought a *patta* of land in the goddess' name.

One branch of Uthandan's family is today known as U.M.S.S., the 'U' being Uthandan, the 'M' being his son Muthukaruppan, the first 'S' being *his* son Sivamuruga. It is with Sivamuruga that one gets a more or less firm date. He was born in 1810 and his son, Subbiah (another 'S') was born in 1840. Subbiah built a small enclosure around and over the stone *pidam* of Pitcharamman. Soon the descendants of the two founding families, the Uthandan and Kadalaikaran groups, had a great dispute and vowed in the name of the goddess to have nothing to do with each other forevermore. For over a hundred years the vow was kept. Before weddings and other family celebrations members of each group trekked to the small shrine to worship and to consult the goddess, but they had nothing to do with each other. Meanwhile, as other Nadar extended families grew more prosperous, they made more proper temples around their *kuladevums* and *kuladevis* but these two, because of their feud, could come to no agreement.

In 1969 some of the younger members of the two groups, led by Chidambaram, decided a reconciliation should be effected. They approached Palanisamy Nadar, the great, great grandson of Subbiah and oldest living member of the clan. Palanisamy was opposed because the original vow had been taken in the name of the goddess. Finally he agreed that if, at the shrine, the lizard chirped within five minutes, the reunion could go ahead. This would be the sign that the goddess approved.[14] Chidambaram—great, great, great grandson of Subbiah—had no doubts. "I was confident," he told me, "because God will never oppose reunions." Sure enough, within two minutes the *kowli* or lizard chirped. Amidst great rejoicing, coconuts were broken and the feuding parties placed garlands around each other's necks.

All the families related to Uthandan and Kadalaikaran had for many years been putting aside a tithe from their profits for

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[14] This prophetic role of the lizard is very old in the Tamil country, as was pointed out in Chapter 2. One finds it textually as long ago as in the *Akananuru*, "seated on the bottom of the cactus which grows by the heap of barren stones in a not too shaded place, the lizard with its soothsaying faultless tiny tongue of bell-like clear sound prognosticates the future of the passers-by." (*Akananuru* 15 : 11-15.) Quoted in Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic* Poetry, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

the goddess. Some funds had been given in Pitcharamman's name to educational institutions, in which the Nadars deeply believe. But there were over fifty thousand rupees immediately available for the renovation. With ample funds available, more land was bought from the village, building began, and in four months the imposing structure described earlier was completed. It was built as a place for extended family gatherings and got its first testing at the formal opening, held in September, 1970. It was apparently easy to bring the descendants of Uthandan and Kadalaikaran together. "All the heads of families keep a family tree," Chidambaram explained. All the relatives were asked to contribute some funds if they could, but it was recognised that poor relations had no financial obligations.

On the opening day of the two-day function about fifteen hundred people were present, two-thirds of them Kadalaikaran's descendants and one-third Uthandan's. The main theme was joint prayer expressing gratitude and solidarity. Most of the first and second day were spent in singing *bhajans* and *bhakti-padals*. Pitcharamman has no songs of her own but there were many songs from the *Thevaram*, the *Thiruvasagam*, Arunagirinather's praises of Murugan, and even from Vaishnavite sources in this strongly Saivite gathering. The first evening a *karagam* group was hired from Madurai, the main reason, according to Chidambaram, being to keep some people from going into Virudhunagar to attend the cinema. *Karagam* is an old Tamil folk dance often associated with fertility rituals. Huge meals were consumed after being offered to the goddess. *Puja* was held only twice and relatively simply. In line with contemporary Nadar practice a male family member was chosen, with Palanisamy's concurrence, to perform the worship. As was pointed out earlier, no Brahmin is allowed to celebrate family *pujas* in most Nadar homes today. There was, of course, no image. Coconuts were broken in the *pidam*, fruit was offered, camphor was lit, bells were rung, and *vibuthi* was distributed. For Chidambaram this was a major moment. "At that time I had a current of *shakti* all over my body. Dew formed in my eyes. I dreamed of the dark night and the heavy rain which was the reason for construction of the temple. These are all the holy doings of *shakti*, goddess Pitcharamman."

For many of the younger element, the high point of the reunion was to be three dramas presented by themselves. One, with the theme of teaching, was written by Chidambaram. This was in the form of a *kalakshepam* modelled after the style of Kripananda Variar. A longer drama on self-discipline had been written by his cousin, then a medical student, and the third took education as its theme and had been acted in and written by N. S. Krishnan, the great Tamil cinema comedian. Krishnan, it will be remembered, had been deeply influenced by the founder of the Dravida Kazhagam, E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker and by Annadurai, and all through the 1940's had portrayed bumbling Brahmins on the screen. This particular Krishnan play was one in which Chidambaram had performed when he was a college student in the mid-1950's. As he put it, "When Krishnan wrote the play he wanted the people to know how important education was. Now, after Kamaraj, all know it is important but still, if the villagers watched, we wanted to help spread Kamaraj's message."

When the time came for the dramas, the rain was coming down heavily, perhaps in commemoration of that first portentous storm. Chidambaram, remembering the earlier story, prayed to Pitcharamman. Finally, at around four o'clock in the morning the rain stopped. Palanisamy was asked if the dramas could go on. He left it to the lizard, who approved, and the two and a half hour drama programme proceeded. In the early dawn, the drenched but tired clan, headed for their homes. The temple had been opened.

There are many questions that could be raised about the family's origin myth. I am primarily interested, however, in the ways this incident ties together not only Chidambaram's life but the major issues of this entire study. Bernard Cohn's framework will serve as a convenient foil. In the celebration, that most primordial of ties, the bond of kinship and of caste (*kulam, jati*), was reaffirmed, not in defiance of modernisation but under its impetus. Throughout the ceremony an awakened regionalism was also present. Pitcharamman as strictly local deity was not as important as the more regional Pitcharamman who was sung to with the *bhajans* of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars*

and of Arunagirinather and other Murugan *bhaktas*. Sanskritisation, or relation to an All-India "Great Tradition," was also very much in evidence. The goddess is seen by most as a form of *shakti* in all-India terminology (although with a more regional *Saiva Siddhanta* imprint). The Nadars identify themselves as *Kshatriyas* an all-India *varna* category. Animal sacrifice, usual for low-caste village deities, was eschewed and the more Sanskritic *puja* was followed (but without brahminic participation). All of these mythic-ritualistic understandings of the past were being strengthened simultaneously and each was transforming the others.

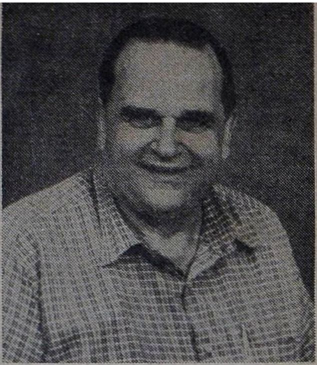
The "direct social-political past" was also being concurrently reinforced on all three levels. The family has gained a clearer, idea of direct historical continuity and a clearer social-economic understanding of the sources of past Nadar deprivation. They have 'Sanskritised' but the image of the Brahmin as priest is rejected in favour of the Brahmin as oppressor. Regional emphases, in social-political terms, were present. Chidambaram's former relationship to the D.M.K. was reflected in his using the N. S. Krishnan drama and his loyalty to the non-Brahmin Tamil, K. Kamaraj. Yet Chidambaram, and his family, partly because of their business interests and partly through Kamaraj's all-India connections, do have a deep loyalty to the Indian nation. Their interpretation of that nation's history, however, would greatly differ from Cohn's North Indian description of that "new" past, especially when regional issues such as language are concerned. The celebration demonstrated that Chidambaram and other members of the family are growingly loyal to caste, region, and India all at the same time.

Above all, Chidambaram and the whole Uthandan-Kadalaikaran clan, are not moving away from a mythic-ritual past toward a direct social-political past. The mythic-ritual past, as enshrined in the family's myth of origin, has grown stronger as the family's involvement in regional and national social-political history has deepened. And "national history" is inextricably intertwined with "mythic-ritual" understandings. "Modernisation," the "new mentality," meaning a sense of directed change or progress, and an affirmation of human

equality, has made a deep impact on the Indian tradition, but it penetrates, and is penetrated by, more traditional loyalties. This penetration does not result in a "supplanting" of the one by the other but of mutual transformations and reinforcements. Chidambaram is loyal to his *jati* but abhors untouchability. He is loyal to the Indian nation, but is equally dedicated to the Tamil language. His Hinduism is stronger than ever but he supports a secular state and education. Contrary to Cohn's assumptions, education and communications heighten local and regional loyalties as much as they do all-India ones.

Pitcharamman stands as a focus for this extended family's loyalties but she is part of a network of growing relationships, mythic-ritual, social-political, local and regional and national-traditional and modern, that makes any model stressing straightforward linear movement from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* appear superficial. Complexity grows as does ambiguity and paradox. *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* remain as two facets, reinforcing each other at times, transforming each other at times, and opposing each other once in a while.

Chidambaram understands some of this but my final metaphor, Pitcharamman, knows all. Perhaps she began as a forest goddess, perhaps as a more mundane village deity. But now she is enshrined in her new temple, the reflection and catalyst of Sanskritic and Dravidian rituals; family, regional, and pan-Indian myths; and the new modern myths and rituals and understandings of "progress" and equality and nationhood. She is more confident, more prosperous and more complex than ever before, but she knows better than anyone that her pilgrimage is far from finished.



ABOUT THE BOOK

THIS BOOK is a study of Tamil Nadu, the state in South India of Tamil speaking people, especially of the period 1949–1972 when the region experienced a renaissance which was reflected in a political and cultural party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Progressive Dravidian Federation). Based on research done for a doctoral dissertation (at Columbia University, U.S.A.) but revised considerably, it focuses on the religious dimensions and consequences on which little has been written. The D.M.K., as it is popularly known, split into two at the close of 1972 because of personality differences, but the Dravidian movement remains the most important political and cultural force in Tamil Nadu. While the study describes the development of an articulate Tamil regionalism, it also furthers an understanding of political-cultural processes throughout India.

About the Author

Beginning at the American College, Madurai, Dr. Ryerson spent several years in India on various educational programmes. A former associate of the C.I.S.R.S., he is now teaching at Princeton Theological Seminary/University, U.S.A.

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